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MONSIEUR BEAUCAIRE

THE BEAUTIFUL LADY

HIS OWN PEOPLE

"Merci, Monsieur le Duc"

MONSIEUR BEAUCAIRE

THE BEAUTIFUL LADY

HIS OWN PEOPLE

BY

BOOTH TARKINGTON

ILLUSTRATED

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MONSIEUR BEAUCAIRE

CHAPTER I

THE young Frenchman did very well what he had planned to do. His guess that the Duke would cheat proved good. As the unshod half-dozen figures that had been standing noiselessly in the entryway stole softly into the shadows of the chamber, he leaned across the table and smilingly plucked a card out of the big Englishman's sleeve.

"Merci, M. le Duc!" he laughed, rising and stepping back from the table.

The Englishman cried out, "It means the dirty work of silencing you with my bare hands!" and came at him.

"Do not move," said M. Beaucaire, so sharply that the other paused. "Observe behind you."

The Englishman turned, and saw what trap he had blundered into; then stood transfixed, impotent, alternately scarlet with rage and white with the vital shame of discovery. M. Beaucaire remarked, in-

dicating the silent figures by a polite wave of the hand, "Is it not a compliment to monsieur that I procure six large men to subdue him? They are quite devote' to me, and monsieur is alone. Could it be that he did not wish even his lackeys to know he play with the yo'ng Frenchman who Meestaire Nash does not like in the pomp-room? Monsieur is unfortunate to have come on foot and alone to my apartment."

The Duke's mouth foamed over with chaotic revilement. His captor smiled brightly, and made a slight gesture, as one who brushes aside a boisterous insect. With the same motion he quelled to stony quiet a resentful impetus of his servants toward the Englishman.

"It's murder, is it, you carrion!" finished the Duke.

M. Beaucaire lifted his shoulders in a mock shiver. "What words! No, no, no! No killing! A such word to a such host! No, no, not mur-r-der; only disgrace!" He laughed a clear, light laugh with a rising inflection, seeming to launch himself upon an adventurous quest for sympathy.

"You little devilish scullion!" spat out the Duke.

"Tut, tut! But I forget. Monsieur has pursue'

his studies of deportment, amongs' his fellow-countrymen."

"Do you dream a soul in Bath will take your word that I—that I——"

"That M. le Duc de Winterset had a card up his sleeve?"

"You pitiful stroller, you stable-boy, born in a stable——"

"Is it not an honor to be born where monsieur must have been bred?"

"You scurvy foot-boy, you greasy barber, you cutthroat groom——"

"Overwhelm'!" The young man bowed with imperturbable elation. "M. le Duc appoint' me to all the office' of his househol'."

"You mustachioed fool, there are not five people of quality in Bath will speak to you——"

"No, monsieur, not on the parade; but how many come to play with me here? Because I will play always, night or day, for what one will, for any long, and al—ways fair, monsieur."

"You outrageous varlet! Every one knows you came to England as the French Ambassador's barber. What man of fashion will listen to you? Who will believe you?"

"All people, monsieur. Do you think I have not calculate', that I shall make a failure of my little enterprise?"

"Bah!"

"Will monsieur not reseat himself?" M. Beaucaire made a low bow. "So. We must not be too tire' for Lady Malbourne's rout. Ha, ha! And you, Jean, Victor, and you others, retire; go in the hallway. Attend at the entrance, Francois. So; now we shall talk. Monsieur, I wish you to think very cool. Then listen; I will be briefly. It is that I am well known to be all, entire' hones'. Gamblist? Ah, yes; true and mos' profitable; but fair, al—ways fair; every one say that. Is it not so? Think of it. And—is there never a w'isper come to M. le Duc that not all people belief him to play al—ways hones'? Ha, ha! Did it almos' be *said* to him las' year, after when he play' with Milor' Tappin'ford at the chocolate-house——"

"You dirty scandal-monger!" the Duke burst out. "I'll——"

"Monsieur, monsieur!" said the Frenchman. "It is a poor valor to insult a helpless captor. Can he retort upon his own victim? But it is for you to think of what I say. True, I am not reco'nize on

the parade; that my frien's who come here do not present me to their ladies; that Meestaire Nash has reboff' me in the pomp-room; still, am I not known for being hones' and fair in my play, and will I *not* be belief', even I, when I lif' my voice and charge you aloud with what is already w'isper'? Think of it! You are a noble, and there will be some hang-dogs who might not fall away from you. Only such would be lef' to you. Do you want it tol'? And you can keep out of France, monsieur? I have lef' his service, but I have still the ear of M. de Mirepoix, and he know' I never lie. Not a gentleman will play you when you come to Paris."

The Englishman's white lip showed a row of scarlet dots upon it. "How much do you want?" he said.

The room rang with the gay laughter of Beaucaire. "I hol' your note' for seven-hunder' pound'. You can have them, monsieur. Why does a such great man come to play M. Beaucaire? Because no one else willin' to play M. le Duc—he cannot pay. Ha, ha! So he come' to good Monsieur Beaucaire. Money, ha, ha! What I want with money?"

His Grace of Winterset's features were set awry

to a sinister pattern. He sat glaring at his companion in a snarling silence.

"Money? Pouf!" snapped the little gambler. "No, no, no! It is that M. le Duc, impoverish', somewhat in a bad odor as he is, yet command, the *entrêe any*-where—onless I— Ha, ha! Eh, monsieur?"

"Ha! You dare think to force *me*——"

M. Beaucaire twirled the tip of his slender mustache around the end of his white forefinger. Then he said: "Monsieur and me goin' to Lady Malbourne's ball to-night—M. le Duc and me!"

The Englishman roared, "Curse your impudence!"

"Sit quiet. Oh, yes, that's all; we goin' together."

"No!"

"Certain. I make all my little plan'. 'Tis all arrange'." He paused, and then said gravely, "You goin' present me to Lady Mary Carlisle."

The other laughed in utter scorn. "Lady Mary Carlisle, of all women alive, would be the first to prefer the devil to a man of no birth, barber."

"'Tis all arrange'; have no fear; nobody question monsieur's guest. You goin' take me to-night——"

"No!"

"Yes. And after—then *I* have the *entrêe*. Is it much I ask? This one little favor, and I never

w'isper, never breathe that—it is to say, I am always forever silent of monsieur's misfortune."

"*You* have the *entrêe!*" sneered the other. "Go to a lackeys' rout and dance with the kitchen maids. If I would, I could not present you to Bath society. I should have cartels from the fathers, brothers, and lovers of every wench and madam in the place, even I. You would be thrust from Lady Malbourne's door five minutes after you entered it."

"No, no, no!"

"Half the gentlemen in Bath have been here to play. They would know you, wouldn't they, fool? You've had thousands out of Bantison, Rakell, Guilford, and Townbrake. They would have you lashed by the grooms as your ugly deserts are. *You* to speak to Lady Mary Carlisle! 'Od's blood! You! Also, dolt, she would know you if you escaped the others. She stood within a yard of you when Nash expelled you the pump-room."

M. Beaucaire flushed slightly. "You think I did not see?" he asked.

"Do you dream that because Winterset introduces a low fellow he will be tolerated—that Bath will receive a barber?"

"I have the distinction to call monsieur's atten-

tion," replied the young man gayly, "I have renounce' that profession."

"Fool!"

"I am now a man of honor!"

"Faugh!"

"A man of the parts," continued the young Frenchman, "and of deportment; is it not so? Have you seen me of a fluster, or gross ever, or, what shall I say—*bourgeois?* Shall you be shame' for your guest' manner? No, no! And my appearance, is it of the people? Clearly, no. Do I not compare in taste of apparel with your yo'ng Englishman? Ha, ha! To be hope'. Ha, ha! So I am goin' talk with Lady Mary Carlisle."

"Bah!" The Duke made a savage burlesque. "'Lady Mary Carlisle, may I assume the honor of presenting the barber of the Marquis de Mirepoix?' So, is it?"

"No, monsieur," smiled the young man. "Quite not so. You shall have nothing to worry you, nothing in the worl'. I am goin' to assassinate my poor mustachio—also remove this horrible black peruke, and emerge in my own hair. Behol'!" He swept the heavy, curled mass from his head as he spoke, and his hair, coiled under the great wig, fell to his

shoulders, and sparkled yellow in the candle-light. He tossed his head to shake the hair back from his cheeks. "When it is dress', I am transform'; nobody can know me; you shall observe. See how little I ask of you, how very little bit. No one shall reco'nize 'M. Beaucaire' or 'Victor.' Ha, ha! 'Tis all arrange'; you have nothing to fear."

"Curse you," said the Duke, "do you think I'm going to be saddled with you wherever I go as long as you choose?"

"A mistake. No. All I requi—All I beg—is this one evening. 'Tis all shall be necessary. *After*, I shall not need monsieur."

"Take heed to yourself—after!" vouchsafed the Englishman between his teeth.

"Conquered!" cried M. Beaucaire, and clapped his hands gleefully. "Conquered for the night! Aha, it is riz'nable! I shall meet what you send —after. One cannot hope too much of your patience. It is but natural you should attem' a little avengement for the rascal trap I was such a wicked fellow as to set for you. I shall meet some strange frien's of yours after to-night; not so? I must try to be not too much frighten'." He looked at the Duke curiously. "You want to know why I create

this tragedy, why I am so unkind as to entrap monsieur?"

His Grace of Winterset replied with a chill glance; a pulse in the nobleman's cheek beat less relentlessly; his eye raged not so bitterly; the steady purple of his own color was returning; his voice was less hoarse; he was regaining his habit. "'Tis ever the manner of the vulgar," he observed, "to wish to be seen with people of fashion."

"Oh, no, no, no!" The Frenchman laughed. "'Tis not that. Am I not already one of these 'men of fashion'? I lack only the reputation of birth. Monsieur is goin' supply that. Ha, ha! I shall be noble from to-night. 'Victor,' the artis', is condemn' to death; his throat shall be cut with his own razor. 'M. Beaucaire'—" Here the young man sprang to his feet, caught up the black wig, clapped into it a dice-box from the table, and hurled it violently through the open door. "'M. Beaucaire' shall be choke' with his own dice-box. Who is the Phœnix to remain? What advantage have I not over other men of rank who are merely born to it? I may choose my own. No! Choose for me, monsieur. Shall I be chevalier, comte, vicomte, marquis, what? None. Out of compliment to mon-

sieur can I wish to be anything he is not? No, no! I shall be M. le Duc, M. le Duc de—de Chateaurien. Ha, ha! You see? You are my *confrere*."

M. Beaucaire trod a dainty step or two, waving his hand politely to the Duke, as though in invitation to join the celebration of his rank. The Englishman watched, his eye still and harsh, already gathering in craftiness. Beaucaire stopped suddenly. "But how I forget my age! I am twenty-three," he said, with a sigh. "I rejoice too much to be of the quality. It has been too great for me, and I had always belief' myself free of such ambition. I thought it was enough to behol' the opera without wishing to sing; but no, England have teach' me I have those vulgar desire'. Monsieur, I am goin' tell you a secret; the ladies of your country are very diff'runt than ours. One may adore the demoiselle, one must worship the lady of England. Our ladies have the—it is the beauty of youth; yours remain comely at thirty. Ours are flowers, yours are stars! See, I betray myself, I am so poor a patriot. And there is one among these stars—ah, yes, there is one—the poor Frenchman has observe' from his humble distance; even

there he could bask in the glowing!" M. Beaucaire turned to the window, and looked out into the dark. He did not see the lights of the town. When he turned again, he had half forgotten his prisoner; other pictures were before him.

"Ah, what radiance!" he cried. "Those people up over the sky, they want to show they wish the earth to be happy, so they smile, and make this lady. Gold-haired, an angel of heaven, and yet a Diana of the chase! I see her fly by me on her great horse one day; she touch' his mane with her fingers. I buy that clipping from the groom. I have it here with my dear brother's picture. Ah, *you!* Oh, yes, you laugh! What do you know! 'Twas all I could get. But I have heard of the endeavor of M. le Duc to recoup his fortunes. This alliance shall fail. It is not the way—that heritage shall be safe' from him! It is you and me, monsieur! You can laugh! The war is open', and by *me!* There is one great step taken: until to-night there was nothing for you to ruin, to-morrow you have got a noble of France—your own *protege*—to besiege and sack. And you are to lose, because you think such ruin easy, and because you understand nothing—far less—of divinity. How could you know? You

have not the fiber; the heart of a lady is a blank to you; you know nothing of the vibration. There are some words that were made only to tell of Lady Mary, for her alone—*bellissima*, divine, *glorieuse!* Ah, how I have watch' her! It is sad to me when I see her surround' by your yo'ng captains, your nobles, your rattles, your beaux—ha, ha!—and I mus' hol' far aloof. It is sad for me—but oh, jus' to watch her and to wonder! Strange it is, but I have almos' cry out with rapture at a look I have see' her give another man, so beautiful it was, so tender, so dazzling of the eyes and so mirthful of the lips. Ah, divine coquetry! A look for another, *ab-i-me!* for many others; and even to you, one day, a rose, while I—I, monsieur, could not even be so blessed as to be the groun' beneath her little shoe! But *to-night*, monsieur—ha, ha!—*to-night*, monsieur, you and me, two princes, M. le Duc de Winterset and M. le Duc de Chateaurien—ha, ha! you see? —we are goin' arm-in-arm to that ball, and *I* am goin' have one of those looks, *I!* And a rose! *I!* It is time. But ten minute', monsieur. I make my apology to keep you waitin' so long while I go in the nex' room and execute my poor mustachio—that will be my only murder for jus' this one even-

ing—and inves' myself in white satin. Ha, ha! I shall be very gran', monsieur. Francois, send Louis to me; Victor, to order two chairs for monsieur and me; we are goin' out in the worl' to-night!"

CHAPTER II

THE chairmen swarmed in the street at Lady Malbourne's door, where the joyous vulgar fought with muddled footmen and tipsy link-boys for places of vantage whence to catch a glimpse of quality and of raiment at its utmost. Dawn was in the east, and the guests were departing. Singly or in pairs, glittering in finery, they came mincing down the steps, the ghost of the night's smirk fading to jadedness as they sought the dark recesses of their chairs. From within sounded the twang of fiddles still swinging manfully at it, and the windows were bright with the light of many candles. When the door was flung open to call the chair of Lady Mary Carlisle, there was an eager pressure of the throng to see.

A small, fair gentleman in white satin came out upon the steps, turned and bowed before a lady who appeared in the doorway, a lady whose royal loveliness was given to view for a moment in that

glowing frame. The crowd sent up a hearty English cheer for the Beauty of Bath.

The gentleman smiled upon them delightedly. "What enchanting people!" he cried. "Why did I not know, so I might have shout' with them?" The lady noticed the people not at all; whereat, being pleased, the people cheered again. The gentleman offered her his hand; she made a slow courtesy; placed the tips of her fingers upon his own. "I am honored, M. de Chateaurien," she said.

"No, no!" he cried earnestly. "Behol' a poor Frenchman whom emperors should envy." Then reverently and with the pride of his gallant office vibrant in every line of his light figure, invested in white satin and very grand, as he had prophesied, M. le Duc de Chateaurien handed Lady Mary Carlisle down the steps, an achievement which had figured in the ambitions of seven other gentlemen during the evening.

"Am I to be lef' in such onhappiness?" he said in a low voice. "That rose I have beg' for so long——"

"Never!" said Lady Mary.

"Ah, I do not deserve it, I know so well! But——"

"Never!"

"It is the greatness of my onworthiness that alone can claim your charity; let your kin' heart give this little red rose, this great alms, to the poor beggar."

"Never!"

She was seated in the chair. "Ah, give the rose," he whispered. Her beauty shone dazzlingly on him out of the dimness.

"Never!" she flashed defiantly as she was closed in. "Never!"

"Ah!"

"Never!"

The rose fell at his feet.

"A rose lasts till morning," said a voice behind him.

Turning, M. de Chateaurien looked beamingly upon the face of the Duke of Winterset.

"'Tis already the daylight," he replied, pointing to the east. "Monsieur, was it not enough honor for you to han' out madame, the aunt of Lady Mary? Lady Rellerton retain' much trace of beauty. 'Tis strange you did not appear more happy."

"The rose is of an unlucky color, I think," observed the Duke.

"The color of a blush, my brother."

"Unlucky, I still maintain," said the other calmly.

"The color of the veins of a Frenchman. Ha, ha!" cried the young man. "What price would be too high? A rose is a rose! A good-night, my brother, a good-night. I wish you dreams of roses, red roses, only beautiful red, red roses!"

"Stay! Did you see the look she gave these street folk when they shouted for her? And how are you higher than they, when she knows? As high as yonder horse-boy!"

"Red roses, my brother, only roses. I wish you dreams of red, red roses!"

CHAPTER III

'TWAS well agreed by the fashion of Bath that M. le Duc de Chateaurien was a person of sensibility and *haut ton;* that his retinue and equipage surpassed in elegance; that his person was exquisite, his manner engaging. In the company of gentlemen his ease was slightly tinged with graciousness (his single equal in Bath being his Grace of Winterset); but it was remarked that when he bowed over a lady's hand, his air bespoke only a gay and tender reverence.

He was the idol of the dowagers within a week after his appearance; matrons warmed to him; young belles looked sweetly on him, while the gentlemen were won to admiration or envy. He was of prodigious wealth: old Mr. Bicksit, who dared not, for his fame's sake, fail to have seen all things, had visited Chateaurien under the present Duke's father, and descanted to the curious upon its grandeurs. The young noble had one fault, he was so poor a gambler. He cared nothing for the hazards

of a die or the turn of a card. Gayly admitting that he had been born with no spirit of adventure in him, he was sure, he declared, that he failed of much happiness by his lack of taste in such matters.

But he was not long wanting the occasion to prove his taste in the matter of handling a weapon. A certain led-captain, Rohrer by name, notorious, amongst other things, for bearing a dexterous and bloodthirsty blade, came to Bath post-haste, one night, and jostled heartily against him in the pump-room on the following morning. M. de Chateaurien bowed, and turned aside without offense, continuing a conversation with some gentlemen near by. Captain Rohrer jostled against him a second time. M. de Chateaurien looked him in the eye, and apologized pleasantly for being so much in the way. Thereupon Rohrer procured an introduction to him, and made some observations derogatory to the valor and virtue of the French.

There was current a curious piece of gossip of the French court: a prince of the blood royal, grandson of the late Regent and second in the line of succession to the throne of France, had rebelled against the authority of Louis XV., who had commanded him to marry the Princess Henriette, cousin to both

of them. The princess was reported to be openly devoted to the cousin who refused to accept her hand at the bidding of the king; and, as rumor ran, the prince's caprice elected in preference the discipline of Vincennes, to which retirement the furious king had consigned him. The story was the staple gossip of all polite Europe; and Captain Rohrer, having in his mind a purpose to make use of it in leading up to a statement that should be general to the damage of all Frenchwomen, and which a Frenchman might not pass over as he might a jog of the elbow, repeated it with garbled truths to make a scandal of a story which bore none on a plain relation.

He did not reach his deduction. M. de Chateaurien, breaking into his narrative, addressed him very quietly. "Monsieur," he said, "none but swine deny the nobleness of that good and gentle lady, Mademoiselle la Princesse de Bourbon-Conti. Every Frenchman know' that her cousin is a bad rebel and ingrate, who had only honor and rispec' for her, but was so wilful he could not let even the king say, 'You shall marry here, you shall marry there.' My frien's," the young man turned to the others, "may I ask you to close roun' in a circle

for one moment? It is clearly shown that the Duke of Orleans is a scurvy fellow, but not—" he wheeled about and touched Captain Rohrer on the brow with the back of his gloved hand—"but not so scurvy as thou, thou swine of the gutter!"

Two hours later, with perfect ease, he ran Captain Rohrer through the left shoulder—after which he sent a basket of red roses to the Duke of Winterset. In a few days he had another captain to fight. This was a ruffling buck who had the astounding indiscretion to proclaim M. de Chateaurien an impostor. There was no Chateaurien, he swore. The Frenchman laughed in his face, and, at twilight of the same day, pinked him carefully through the right shoulder. It was not that he could not put aside the insult to himself, he declared to Mr. Molyneux, his second, and the few witnesses, as he handed his wet sword to his lackey—one of his station could not be insulted by a doubt of that station—but he fought in the quarrel of his friend Winterset. This rascal had asserted that M. le Duc had introduced an impostor. Could he overlook the insult to a friend, one to whom he owed his kind reception in Bath? Then, bending over his fallen adversary, he whispered: "Naughty man, tell your

master find some better quarrel for the nex' he sen' agains' me."

The conduct of M. de Chateaurien was pronounced admirable.

There was no surprise when the young foreigner fell naturally into the long train of followers of the beautiful Lady Mary Carlisle, nor was there great astonishment that he should obtain marked favor in her eyes, shown so plainly that my Lord Townbrake, Sir Hugh Guilford, and the rich Squire Bantison, all of whom had followed her through three seasons, swore with rage, and his Grace of Winterset stalked from her aunt's house with black brows.

Meeting the Duke there on the evening after his second encounter, de Chateaurien smiled upon him brilliantly. "It was badly done; *oh*, so badly!" he whispered. "Can you afford to have me strip' of my mask by any but yourself? You, who introduce' me? They will say there is some bad scandal that I could force you to be my god-father. You mus' get the courage yourself."

"I told you a rose had a short life," was the answer.

"Oh, those roses! 'Tis the very greates' rizzon to gather each day a fresh one." He took a red

bud from his breast for an instant, and touched it to his lips.

"M. de Chateaurien!" It was Lady Mary's voice; she stood at a table where a vacant place had been left beside her. "M. de Chateaurien, we have been waiting very long for you."

The Duke saw the look she did not know she gave the Frenchman, and he lost countenance for a moment.

"We approach a climax, eh, monsieur?" said M. de Chateaurien.

CHAPTER IV

THERE fell a clear September night, when the moon was radiant over town and country, over cobbled streets and winding roads. From the fields the mists rose slowly, and the air was mild and fragrant, while distances were white and full of mystery. All of Bath that pretended to fashion or condition was present that evening at a *fête* at the house of a country gent'eman of the neighborhood. When the stately junket was concluded, it was the pleasure of M. de Chateaurien to form one of the escort of Lady Mary's carriage for the return. As they took the road, Sir Hugh Guilford and Mr. Bantison, engaging in indistinct but vigorous remonstrance with Mr. Molyneux over some matter, fell fifty or more paces behind, where they continued to ride, keeping up their argument. Half a dozen other gallants rode in advance, muttering among themselves, or attended laxly upon Lady Mary's aunt on the other side of the coach, while the happy Frenchman was permitted to ride close

to that adorable window which framed the fairest face in England.

He sang for her a little French song, a song of the *voyageur* who dreamed of home. The lady, listening, looking up at the bright moon, felt a warm drop upon her cheek, and he saw the tears sparkling upon her lashes.

"Mademoiselle," he whispered then, "I, too, have been a wanderer, but my dreams were not of France; no, I do not dream of that home, of that dear country. It is of a dearer country, a dream country—a country of gold and snow," he cried softly, looking at her white brow and the fair, lightly powdered hair above it. "Gold and snow, and the blue sky of a lady's eyes!"

"I had thought the ladies of France were dark, sir."

"Cruel! It is that she will not understan'! Have I speak of the ladies of France? No, no, no! It is of the faires' country; yes, 'tis a province of heaven, mademoiselle. Do I not renounce my allegiance to France? Oh, yes! I am subjec'—no, content to be slave—in the lan' of the blue sky, the gold, and the snow."

"A very pretty figure," answered Lady Mary,

her eyes downcast. "But does it not hint a notable experience in the making of such speeches?"

"Tormentress! No. It prove' only the inspiration it is to know you."

"We English ladies hear plenty of the like, sir; and we even grow brilliant enough to detect the assurance that lies beneath the courtesies of our own gallants."

"*Merci!* I should believe so!" ejaculated M. de Chateaurien; but he smothered the words upon his lips.

Her eyes were not lifted. She went on: "We come, in time, to believe that true feeling comes faltering forth, not glibly; that smoothness betokens the adept in the art, sir, rather than your true—your true—" She was herself faltering; more, blushing deeply, and halting to a full stop in terror of a word. There was a silence.

"Your—true—lover," he said huskily. When he had said that word both trembled. She turned half way into the darkness of the coach.

"I know what make' you to doubt me," he said, faltering himself, though it was not his art that prompted him. "They have tol' you the French do nothing al—ways but make love, is it not so? Yes,

you think *I* am like that. You think I am like that now!"

She made no sign.

"I suppose," he sighed, "I am unriz'nable; I would have the snow not so col'—for jus' me."

She did not answer.

"Turn to me," he said.

The fragrance of the fields came to them, and from the distance the faint, clear note of a hunting-horn.

"Turn to me."

The lovely head was bent very low. Her little gloved hand lay upon the narrow window ledge. He laid his own gently upon it. The two hands were shaking like twin leaves in the breeze. Hers was not drawn away. After a pause, neither knew how long, he felt the warm fingers turn and clasp themselves tremulously about his own. At last she looked up bravely and met his eyes. The horn was wound again—nearer.

"All the cold was gone from the snows—long ago," she said.

"My beautiful!" he whispered; it was all he could say. "My beautiful!" But she clutched his arm, startled.

"'*Ware the road!*" A wild halloo sounded ahead. The horn wound loudly. "'*Ware the road!*" There sprang up out of the night a flying thunder of hoof-beats. The gentlemen riding idly in front of the coach scattered to the hedge-sides; and, with drawn swords flashing in the moon, a party of horsemen charged down the highway, their cries blasting the night.

"Barber! Kill the barber!" they screamed. "Barber! Kill the barber!"

Beaucaire had but time to draw his sword when they were upon him.

"*A moi!*" his voice rang out clearly as he rose in his stirrups. "*A moi*, Francois, Louis, Berquin! *A moi*, Francois!"

The cavaliers came straight at him. He parried the thrust of the first, but the shock of collision hurled his horse against the side of the coach.

"Sacred swine!" he cried bitterly. "To endanger a lady, to make this brawl in a lady's presence! Drive on!" he shouted.

"No!" cried Lady Mary.

The Frenchman's assailants were masked, but they were not highwaymen. "Barber! Barber!" they shouted hoarsely, and closed in on him in a circle.

"See how he use his steel!" laughed M. Beaucaire, as his point passed through a tawdry waistcoat. For a moment he cut through the ring and cleared a space about him, and Lady Mary saw his face shining in the moonlight. "*Canaille!*" he hissed, as his horse sank beneath him; and, though guarding his head from the rain of blows from above, he managed to drag headlong from his saddle the man who had hamstrung the poor brute. The fellow came suddenly to the ground, and lay there.

"Is it not a compliment," said a heavy voice, "to bring six large men to subdue monsieur?"

"Oh, you are there, my frien'! In the rear—a a little in the rear, I think. Ha, ha!"

The Frenchman's play with his weapon was a revelation of skill, the more extraordinary as he held in his hand only a light dress sword. But the ring closed about him, and his keen defense could not avail him for more than a few moments. Lady Mary's outriders, the gallants of her escort, rode up close to the coach and encircled it, not interfering.

"Sir Hugh Guilford!" cried Lady Mary wildly, "if you will not help him, give me your sword!"

She would have leaped to the ground, but Sir Hugh held the door.

"Sit quiet, madam," he said to her; then, to the man on the box, "Drive on."

"If he does, I'll kill him!" she said fiercely. "Ah, what cowards! Will you see the Duke murdered?"

"The Duke!" laughed Guilford. "They will not kill him, unless—be easy, dear madam, 'twill be explained. Gad's life!" he muttered to Molyneux, "'Twere time the varlet had his lashing! D'ye hear her?"

"Barber or no barber," answered Molyneux, "I wish I had warned him. He fights as few gentlemen could. Ah—ah! Look at that! 'Tis a shame!"

On foot, his hat gone, his white coat sadly rent and gashed, flecked, too, with red, M. Beaucaire, wary, alert, brilliant, seemed to transform himself into a dozen fencing-masters; and, though his skill appeared to lie in delicacy and quickness, his play being continually with the point, sheer strength failed to beat him down. The young man was laughing like a child.

"Believe me," said Molyneux, "he's no barber! No, and never was!"

For a moment there was even a chance that M. Beaucaire might have the best of it. Two of his adversaries were prostrate, more than one were groaning, and the indomitable Frenchman had actually almost beat off the ruffians, when, by a trick, he was overcome. One of them, dismounting, ran in suddenly from behind, and seized his blade in a thick leather gauntlet. Before Beaucaire could disengage the weapon, two others threw themselves from their horses and hurled him to the earth. "*A moi! A moi*, Francois!" he cried as he went down, his sword in fragments, but his voice unbroken and clear.

"Shame!" muttered one or two of the gentlemen about the coach.

"'Twas dastardly to take him so," said Molyneux. "Whatever his deservings, I'm nigh of a mind to offer him a rescue in the Duke's face."

"Truss him up, lads," said the heavy voice. "Clear the way in front of the coach. There sit those whom we avenge upon a presumptuous lackey. Now, Whiffen, you have a fair audience, lay on and baste him."

Two men began to drag M. Beaucaire toward

a great oak by the roadside. Another took from his saddle a heavy whip with three thongs.

"*A moi, Francois!*"

There was borne on the breeze an answer—"*Monseigneur! Monseigneur!*" The cry grew louder suddenly. The clatter of hoofs urged to an anguish of speed sounded on the night. M. Beaucaire's servants had lagged sorely behind, but they made up for it now. Almost before the noise of their own steeds they came riding down the moonlit aisle between the mists. Chosen men, these servants of Beaucaire, and like a thunderbolt they fell upon the astounded cavaliers.

"Chateaurien! Chateaurien!" they shouted, and smote so swiftly that, through lack of time, they showed no proper judgment, discriminating nothing between non-combatants and their master's foes. They charged first into the group about M. Beaucaire, and broke and routed it utterly. Two of them leaped to the young man's side, while the other four, swerving, scarce losing the momentum of their onset, bore on upon the gentlemen near the coach, who went down beneath the fierceness of the onslaught, cursing manfully.

"Our just deserts," said Mr. Molyneux, his mouth full of dust and philosophy.

Sir Hugh Guilford's horse fell with him, being literally ridden over, and the baronet's leg was pinned under the saddle. In less than ten minutes from the first attack on M. Beaucaire, the attacking party had fled in disorder, and the patrician non-combatants, choking with expletives, consumed with wrath, were prisoners, disarmed by the Frenchman's lackeys.

Guilford's discomfiture had freed the doors of the coach; so it was that when M. Beaucaire, struggling to rise, assisted by his servants, threw out one hand to balance himself, he found it seized between two small, cold palms, and he looked into two warm, dilating eyes, that were doubly beautiful because of the fright and rage that found room in them, too.

M. le Duc Chateaurien sprang to his feet without the aid of his lackeys, and bowed low before Lady Mary.

"I make ten thousan' apology to be the cause of a such *mêlee* in your presence," he said; and then, turning to Francois, he spoke in French: "Ah, thou scoundrel! A little, and it had been too late."

Francois knelt in the dust before him. "Pardon!"

he said. "Monseigneur commanded us to follow far in the rear, to remain unobserved. The wind malignantly blew against monseigneur's voice."

"See what it might have cost, my children," said his master, pointing to the ropes with which they would have bound him and to the whip lying beside them. A shudder passed over the lackey's frame; the utter horror in his face echoed in the eyes of his fellows.

"Oh, monseigneur!" Francois sprang back, and tossed his arms to heaven.

"But it did not happen," said M. Beaucaire.

"It could not!" exclaimed Francois.

"No. And you did very well, my children—" the young man smiled benevolently—"very well. And now," he continued, turning to Lady Mary and speaking in English, "let me be asking of our gallants yonder what make' them to be in cabal with highwaymen. One should come to a polite understanding with them, you think? Not so?"

He bowed, offering his hand to conduct her to the coach, where Molyneux and his companions, having drawn Sir Hugh from under his horse, were engaged in reviving and reassuring Lady Rellerton, who had fainted. But Lady Mary stayed Beaucaire

with a gesture, and the two stood where they were.

"Monseigneur!" she said, with a note of raillery in her voice, but raillery so tender that he started with happiness. His movement brought him a hot spasm of pain, and he clapped his hand to a red stain on his waistcoat.

"You are hurt!"

"It is nothing," smiled M. Beaucaire. Then, that she might not see the stain spreading, he held his handkerchief over the spot. "I am a little—but jus' a trifling—bruise'; 'tis all."

"You shall ride in the coach," she whispered. "Will you be pleased, M. de Chateaurien?"

"Ah, my beautiful!" She seemed to wave before him like a shining mist. "I wish that ride might las' for al—ways! Can you say that, mademoiselle?"

"Monseigneur," she cried in a passion of admiration, "I would what you would have be, should be. What do you not deserve? You are the bravest man in the world!"

"Ha, ha! I am jus' a poor Frenchman."

"Would that a few Englishmen had shown themselves as 'poor' to-night. The vile cowards, not to

help you!" With that, suddenly possessed by her anger, she swept away from him to the coach.

Sir Hugh, groaning loudly, was being assisted into the vehicle.

"My little poltroons," she said, "what are you doing with your fellow-craven, Sir Hugh Guilford, there?"

"Madam," replied Molyneux humbly, "Sir Hugh's leg is broken. Lady Rellerton graciously permits him to be taken in."

"*I* do not permit it! M. de Chateaurien rides with us."

"But——"

"Sir! Leave the wretch to groan by the roadside," she cried fiercely, "which plight I would were that of all of you! But there will be a pretty story for the gossips to-morrow! And I could almost find pity for you when I think of the wits when you return to town. Fine gentlemen you; hardy bravoes, by heaven! to leave one man to meet a troop of horse single-handed, while you huddle in shelter until you are overthrown and disarmed by servants! Oh, the wits! Heaven save you from the wits!"

"Madam."

"Address me no more! M. de Chateaurien, Lady Rellerton and I will greatly esteem the honor of your company. Will you come?"

She stepped quickly into the coach, and was gathering her skirts to make room for the Frenchman, when a heavy voice spoke from the shadows of the tree by the wayside.

"Lady Mary Carlisle will, no doubt, listen to a word of counsel on this point."

The Duke of Winterset rode out into the moonlight, composedly untieing a mask from about his head. He had not shared the flight of his followers, but had retired into the shade of the oak, whence he now made his presence known with the utmost coolness.

"Gracious heavens, 'tis Winterset!" exclaimed Lady Rellerton.

"Turned highwayman and cutthroat," cried Lady Mary.

"No, no," laughed M. Beaucaire, somewhat unsteadily, as he stood, swaying a little, with one hand on the coach-door, the other pressed hard on his side, "he only oversee'; he is jus' a little bashful, sometime'. He is a great man, but he don' want *all* the glory!"

"Barber," replied the Duke, "I must tell you that I gladly descend to bandy words with you; your monstrous impudence is a claim to rank I cannot ignore. But a lackey who has himself followed by six other lackeys——"

"Ha, ha! Has not M. le Duc been busy all this evening to justify me? And I think mine mus' be the bes' six. Ha, ha! You think?"

"M. de Chateaurien," said Lady Mary, "we are waiting for you."

"Pardon," he replied. "He has something to say; maybe it is bes' if you hear it now."

"I wish to hear nothing from him—ever!"

"My faith, madam," cried the Duke, "this saucy fellow has paid you the last insult! He is so sure of you he does not fear you will believe the truth. When all is told, if you do not agree he deserved the lashing we planned to——"

"I'll hear no more!"

"You will bitterly repent it, madam. For your own sake I entreat——"

"And I also," broke in M. Beaucaire. "Permit me, mademoiselle; let him speak."

"Then let him be brief," said Lady Mary, "for I am earnest to be quit of him. His explanation of

an attack on my friend and on my carriage should be made to my brother."

"Alas that he was not here," said the Duke, "to aid me! Madam, was your carriage threatened? I have endeavored only to expunge a debt I owed to Bath and to avenge an insult offered to yourself through——"

"Sir, sir, my patience will bear little more!"

"A thousan' apology," said M. Beaucaire. "You will listen, I only beg, Lady Mary?"

She made an angry gesture of assent.

"Madam, I will be brief as I may. Two months ago there came to Bath a French gambler calling himself Beaucaire, a desperate fellow with the cards or dice, and all the men of fashion went to play at his lodging, where he won considerable sums. He was small, wore a black wig and mustachio. He had the insolence to show himself everywhere until the Master of Ceremonies rebuffed him in the pump-room, as you know, and after that he forebore his visits to the rooms. Mr. Nash explained (and was confirmed, madam, by indubitable information) that this Beaucaire was a man of unspeakable, vile, low birth, being, in fact, no other than a lackey of the French king's ambassador, Victor by name, de

Mirepoix's barber. Although his condition was known, the hideous impudence of the fellow did not desert him, and he remained in Bath, where none would speak to him."

"Is your farrago nigh done, sir?"

"A few moments, madam. One evening, three weeks gone, I observed a very elegant equipage draw up to my door, and the Duke of Chateaurien was announced. The young man's manners were worthy—according to the French acceptance—and 'twere idle to deny him the most monstrous assurance. He declared himself a noble traveling for pleasure. He had taken lodgings in Bath for a season, he said, and called at once to pay his respects to me. His tone was so candid—in truth, I am the simplest of men, very easily gulled—and his stroke so bold, that I did not for one moment suspect him; and, to my poignant regret—though in the humblest spirit I have shown myself eager to atone—that very evening I had the shame of presenting him to yourself."

"The shame, sir!"

"Have patience, pray, madam. Ay, the shame! You know what figure he hath cut in Bath since that evening. All ran merrily with him until several

days ago Captain Badger denounced him as an impostor, vowing that Chateaurien was nothing."

"Pardon," interrupted M. Beaucaire. "'Castle Nowhere' would have been so much better. Why did you not make him say it that way, monsieur?"

Lady Mary started; she was looking at the Duke, and her face was white. He continued: "Poor Captain Badger was stabbed that same day——"

"Most befitting poor Captain Badger," muttered Molyneux.

"—And his adversary had the marvelous insolence to declare that he fought in *my* quarrel! This afternoon the wounded man sent for me, and imparted a very horrifying intelligence. He had discovered a lackey whom he had seen waiting upon Beaucaire in attendance at the door of this Chateaurien's lodging. Beaucaire had disappeared the day before Chateaurien's arrival. Captain Badger looked closely at Chateaurien at their next meeting, and identified him with the missing Beaucaire beyond the faintest doubt. Overcome with indignation, he immediately proclaimed the impostor. Out of regard for me, he did not charge him with being Beaucaire; the poor soul was unwilling to put upon me the humiliation of having introduced a

barber; but the secret weighed upon him till he sent for me and put everything in my hands. I accepted the odium; thinking only of atonement. I went to Sir John Wimpledon's *fête*. I took poor Sir Hugh, there, and these other gentlemen aside, and told them my news. We narrowly observed this man, and were shocked at our simplicity in not having discovered him before. These are men of honor and cool judgment, madam. Mr. Molyneux had acted for him in the affair of Captain Badger, and was strongly prejudiced in his favor; but Mr. Molyneux, Sir Hugh, Mr. Bantison, every one of them, in short, recognized him. In spite of his smooth face and his light hair, the adventurer Beaucaire was writ upon him amazing plain. Look at him, madam, if he will dare the inspection. You saw this Beaucaire well, the day of his expulsion from the rooms. Is not this he?"

M. Beaucaire stepped close to her. Her pale face twitched.

"Look!" he said.

"Oh, oh!" she whispered with a dry throat, and fell back in the carriage.

"Is it so?" cried the Duke.

"I do not know—I—cannot tell."

"One moment more. I begged these gentlemen to allow me to wipe out the insult I had unhappily offered to Bath, but particularly to you. They agreed not to forestall me or to interfere. I left Sir John Wimpledon's early, and arranged to give the sorry rascal a lashing under your own eyes, a satisfaction due the lady into whose presence he had dared to force himself."

"'*Noblesse oblige*'?" said M. Beaucaire in a tone of gentle inquiry.

"And now, madam," said the Duke, "I will detain you not one second longer. I plead the good purpose of my intentions, begging you to believe that the desire to avenge a hateful outrage, next to the wish to serve you, forms the dearest motive in the heart of Winterset."

"Bravo!" cried Beaucaire softly.

Lady Mary leaned toward him, a thriving terror in her eyes. "It is false?" she faltered.

"Monsieur should not have been born so high. He could have made little book'."

"You mean it is false?" she cried breathlessly.

"'Od's blood, is she not convinced?" broke out Mr. Bantison. "Fellow, were you not the ambassador's barber?"

"It is all false?" she whispered.

"The mos' fine art, mademoiselle. How long you think it take M. de Winterset to learn that speech after he write it out? It is a mix of what is true and the mos' chaste art. Monsieur has become a man of letters. Perhaps he may enjoy that more than the wars. Ha, ha!"

Mr. Bantison burst into a roar of laughter. "Do French gentlemen fight lackeys? Ho, ho, ho! A pretty country! We English do as was done to-night, have our servants beat them."

"And attend ourselves," added M. Beaucaire, looking at the Duke, "somewhat in the background? But, pardon," he mocked, "that remind' me. Francois, return to Mr. Bantison and these gentlemen their weapons."

"Will you answer a question?" said Molyneux mildly.

"Oh, with pleasure, monsieur."

"Were you ever a barber?"

"No, monsieur," laughed the young man.

"Pah!" exclaimed Bantison. "Let me question him. Now, fellow, a confession may save you from jail. Do you deny you are Beaucaire?"

"Deny to a such judge?"

"Ha!" said Bantison. "What more do you want, Molyneux? Fellow, do you deny that you came to London in the ambassador's suite?"

"No, I do not deny."

"He admits it! Didn't you come as his barber?"

"Yes, my frien', as his barber."

Lady Mary cried out faintly, and, shuddering, put both hands over her eyes.

"I'm sorry," said Molyneux. "You fight like a gentleman."

"I thank you, monsieur."

"You called yourself Beaucaire?"

"Yes, monsieur." He was swaying to and fro; his servants ran to support him.

"I wish—" continued Molyneux, hesitating. "Evil take me!—but I'm sorry you're hurt."

"Assist Sir Hugh into my carriage," said Lady Mary.

"Farewell, mademoiselle!" M. Beaucaire's voice was very faint. His eyes were fixed upon her face. She did not look toward him.

They were propping Sir Hugh on the cushions. The Duke rode up close to Beaucaire, but Francois seized his bridle fiercely, and forced the horse back on its haunches.

"The man's servants worship him," said Molyneux.

"Curse your insolence!" exclaimed the Duke. "How much am I to bear from this varlet and his varlets? Beaucaire, if you have not left Bath by to-morrow noon, you will be clapped into jail, and the lashing you escaped to-night shall be given you thrice tenfold!"

"I shall be—in the—Assembly—Room' at nine —o'clock, one week—from—to-night," answered the young man, smiling jauntily, though his lips were colorless. The words cost him nearly all his breath and strength. "You mus' keep—in the—back-groun', monsieur. Ha, ha!"

The door of the coach closed with a slam.

"Mademoiselle—fare—well!"

"Drive on!" said Lady Mary.

M. Beaucaire followed the carriage with his eyes. As the noise of the wheels and the hoof-beats of the accompanying cavalcade grew fainter in the distance, the handkerchief he had held against his side dropped into the white dust, a heavy red splotch.

"Only—roses," he gasped, and fell back in the arms of his servants.

CHAPTER V

BEAU NASH stood at the door of the rooms, smiling blandly upon a dainty throng in the pink of its finery and gay furbelows. The great exquisite bent his body constantly in a series of consummately adjusted bows: before a great dowager, seeming to sweep the floor in august deference; somewhat stately to the young bucks; greeting the wits with gracious friendliness and a twinkle of raillery; inclining with fatherly gallantry before the beauties; the degree of his inclination measured the altitude of the recipient as accurately as a nicely calculated sand-glass measures the hours.

The King of Bath was happy, for wit, beauty, fashion—to speak more concretely: nobles, belles, gamesters, beaux, statesmen, and poets—made fairyland (or opera bouffe, at least) in his dominions; play ran higher and higher, and Mr. Nash's coffers filled up with gold. To crown his pleasure, a prince of the French blood, the young Comte de

Beaujolais, just arrived from Paris, had reached Bath at noon in state, accompanied by the Marquis de Mirepoix, the ambassador of Louis XV. The Beau dearly prized the society of the lofty, and the present visit was an honor to Bath: hence to the Master of Ceremonies. What was better, there would be some profitable hours with the cards and dice. So it was that Mr. Nash smiled never more benignly than on that bright evening. The rooms rang with the silvery voices of women and delightful laughter, while the fiddles went merrily, their melodies chiming sweetly with the joyance of his mood.

The skill and brazen effrontery of the ambassador's scoundrelly servant in passing himself off for a man of condition formed the point of departure for every conversation. It was discovered that there were but three persons present who had not suspected him from the first; and, by a singular paradox, the most astute of all proved to be old Mr. Bicksit, the traveler, once a visitor at Chateaurien; for he, according to report, had by a coup of diplomacy entrapped the impostor into an admission that there was no such place. However, like poor Captain Badger, the worthy old man

had held his peace out of regard for the Duke of Winterset. This nobleman, heretofore secretly disliked, suspected of irregular devices at play, and never admired, had won admiration and popularity by his remorse for the mistake, and by the modesty of his attitude in endeavoring to atone for it, without presuming upon the privilege of his rank to laugh at the indignation of society; an action the more praiseworthy because his exposure of the impostor entailed the disclosure of his own culpability in having stood the villain's sponsor. To-night, the happy gentleman, with Lady Mary Carlisle upon his arm, went grandly about the rooms, sowing and reaping a harvest of smiles. 'Twas said work would be begun at once to rebuild the Duke's country seat, while several ruined Jews might be paid out of prison. People gazing on the beauty and the stately but modest hero by her side, said they would make a noble pair. She had long been distinguished by his attentions, and he had come brilliantly out of the episode of the Frenchman, who had been his only real rival. Wherever they went, there arose a buzz of pleasing gossip and adulation.

Mr. Nash, seeing them near him, came forward

with greetings. A word on the side passed between the nobleman and the exquisite.

"I had news of the rascal to-night," whispered Nash. "He lay at a farm till yesterday, when he disappeared; his ruffians, too."

"You have arranged?" asked the Duke.

"Fourteen bailiffs are watching without. He could not come within gunshot. If they clap eyes on him, they will hustle him to jail, and his cut-throats shall not avail him a hair's weight. The impertinent swore he'd be here by nine, did he?"

"He said so; and 'tis a rash dog, sir."

"It is just nine now."

"Send out to see if they have taken him."

"Gladly." The Beau beckoned an attendant, and whispered in his ear.

Many of the crowd had edged up to the two gentlemen with apparent carelessness, to overhear their conversation. Those who did overhear repeated it in covert asides, and this circulating undertone, confirming a vague rumor that Beaucaire would attempt the entrance that night, lent a pleasurable color of excitement to the evening. The French prince, the ambassador, and their suites were announced. Polite as the assembly

was, it was also curious, and there occurred a mannerly rush to see the newcomers. Lady Mary, already pale, grew whiter as the throng closed round her; she looked up pathetically at the Duke, who lost no time in extricating her from the pressure.

"Wait here," he said; "I will fetch you a glass of negus," and disappeared. He had not thought to bring a chair, and she, looking about with an increasing faintness and finding none, saw that she was standing by the door of a small side-room. The crowd swerved back for the passage of the legate of France, and pressed upon her. She opened the door, and went in.

The room was empty save for two gentlemen, who were quietly playing cards at a table. They looked up as she entered. They were M. Beaucaire and Mr. Molyneux.

She uttered a quick cry and leaned against the wall, her hand to her breast. Beaucaire, though white and weak, had brought her a chair before Molyneux could stir.

"Mademoiselle——"

"Do not touch me!" she cried, with such frozen abhorrence in her voice that he stopped short. "Mr. Molyneux, you seek strange company!"

"Madam," replied Molyneux, bowing deeply, as much to Beaucaire as to herself, "I am honored by the presence of both of you."

"Oh, are you mad!" she exclaimed, contemptuously.

"This gentleman has exalted me with his confidence, madam," he replied.

"Will you add your ruin to the scandal of this fellow's presence here? How he obtained entrance——"

"Pardon, mademoiselle," interrupted Beaucaire. "Did I not say I should come? M. Molyneux was so obliging as to answer for me to the fourteen frien's of M. de Winterset and *Meestaire* Nash."

"Do you not know," she turned vehemently upon Molyneux, "that he will be removed the moment I leave this room? Do you wish to be dragged out with him? For your sake, sir, because I have always thought you a man of heart, I give you a chance to save yourself from disgrace—and —your companion from jail. Let him slip out by some retired way, and you may give me your arm and we will enter the next room as if nothing had happened. Come, sir——"

"Mademoiselle——"

"Mr. Molyneux, I desire to hear nothing from your companion. Had I not seen you at cards with him I should have supposed him in attendance as your lackey. Do you desire to take advantage of my offer, sir?"

"Mademoiselle, I could not tell you, on that night——"

"You may inform your high-born friend, Mr. Molyneux, that I heard everything he had to say; that my pride once had the pleasure of listening to his high-born confession!"

"Ah, it is gentle to taunt one with his birth, mademoiselle? Ah, no! There is a man in my country who say strange things of that—that a man is not his father, but *himself*."

"You may inform your friend, Mr. Molyneux, that he had a chance to defend himself against accusation; that he said all——"

"That I did say all I could have strength to say. Mademoiselle, you did not see—as it was right—that I had been stung by a big wasp. It was nothing, a scratch; but, mademoiselle, the sky went round and the moon dance' on the earth. I could not wish that big wasp to see he had stung

"She was silent, a statue"

me; so I mus' only say what I can have strength for, and stan' straight till he is gone. Beside', there are other rizzons. Ah, you mus' belief! My Molyneux I sen' for, and tell him all, because he show courtesy to the yo'ng Frenchman, and I can trus' him. I trus' you, mademoiselle—long ago—and would have tol' you ev'rything, excep' jus' because—well, for the romance, the fon! You belief? It is so clearly so; you do belief, mademoiselle?"

She did not even look at him. M. Beaucaire lifted his hand appealingly toward her. "Can there be no faith in—in—" he said timidly, and paused. She was silent, a statue, my Lady Disdain.

"If you had not belief' me to be an impostor; if I had never said I was Chateaurien; if I had been jus' that Monsieur Beaucaire of the story they tol' you, but never with the *heart* of a lackey, an hones' man, a *man*, the man you knew, *himself*, could you—would you—" He was trying to speak firmly; yet, as he gazed upon her splendid beauty, he choked slightly, and fumbled in the lace at his throat with unsteady fingers—"Would you—have let me ride by your side in the autumn moon-

light?" Her glance passed by him as it might have passed by a footman or a piece of furniture. He was dressed magnificently, a multitude of orders glittering on his breast. Her eye took no knowledge of him.

"Mademoiselle—I have the honor to ask you; if you had known this Beaucaire was hones', though of peasant birth, would you——"

Involuntarily, controlled as her icy presence was, she shuddered. There was a moment of silence.

"Mr. Molyneux," said Lady Mary, "in spite of your discourtesy in allowing a servant to address me, I offer you a last chance to leave this room undisgraced. Will you give me your arm?"

"Pardon me, madam," said Mr. Molyneux.

Beaucaire dropped into a chair with his head bent low and his arm outstretched on the table; his eyes filled slowly in spite of himself, and two tears rolled down the young man's cheeks.

"An' live men are jus'—*names!*" said M. Beaucaire.

CHAPTER VI

IN the outer room, Winterset, unable to find Lady Mary, and supposing her to have joined Lady Rellerton, disposed of his negus, then approached the two visitors to pay his respects to the young prince, whom he discovered to be a stripling of seventeen, arrogant-looking, but pretty as a girl. Standing beside the Marquis de Mirepoix—a man of quiet bearing—he was surrounded by a group of the great, among whom Mr. Nash naturally counted himself. The Beau was felicitating himself that the foreigners had not arrived a week earlier, in which case he and Bath would have been detected in a piece of gross ignorance concerning the French nobility—making much of de Mirepoix's ex-barber.

"'Tis a lucky thing that fellow was got out of the way," he ejaculated, under cover.

"Thank me for it," rejoined Winterset.

An attendant begged Mr. Nash's notice. The head bailiff sent word that Beaucaire had long

since entered the building by a side door. It was supposed Mr. Nash had known of it, and the Frenchman was not arrested, as Mr. Molyneux was in his company, and said he would be answerable for him. Consternation was so plain on the Beau's trained face that the Duke leaned toward him anxiously.

"The villain's in, and Molyneux hath gone mad!"

Mr. Bantison, who had been fiercely elbowing his way toward them, joined heads with them. "You may well say he is in," he exclaimed, "and if you want to know where, why, in yonder card-room. I saw him through the half-open door."

"What's to be done?" asked the Beau.

"Send the bailiffs——"

"Fie, fie! A file of bailiffs? The scandal!"

"Then listen to me," said the Duke. "I'll select half-a-dozen gentlemen, explain the matter, and we'll put him in the center of us and take him out to the bailiffs. 'Twill appear nothing. Do you remain here and keep the attention of Beaujolais and de Mirepoix. Come, Bantison, fetch Townbrake and Harry Rakell yonder; I'll bring the others."

Three minutes later, his Grace of Winterset flung wide the card-room door, and, after his friends had entered, closed it.

"Ah!" remarked M. Beaucaire quietly. "Six more large men."

The Duke, seeing Lady Mary, started; but the angry signs of her interview had not left her face, and reassured him. He offered his hand to conduct her to the door. "May I have the honor?"

"If this is to be known, 'twill be better if I leave after; I should be observed if I went now."

"As you will, madam," he answered, not displeased. "And now, you impudent villain," he began, turning to M. Beaucaire, but to fall back astounded. "'Od's blood, the dog hath murdered and robbed some royal prince!" He forgot Lady Mary's presence in his excitement. "Lay hands on him!" he shouted. "Tear those orders from him!"

Molyneux threw himself between. "One word!" he cried. "One word before you offer an outrage you will repent all your lives!"

"Or let M. de Winterset come alone," laughed M. Beaucaire.

"Do you expect me to fight a cutthroat barber, and with bare hands?"

"I think one does not expec' monsieur to fight anybody. Would *I* fight you, you think? That was why I had my servants, that evening we play. I would gladly fight almos' any one in the worl'; but I did not wish to soil my hand with a——"

"Stuff his lying mouth with his orders!" shouted the Duke.

But Molyneux still held the gentlemen back. "One moment," he cried.

"M. de Winterset," said Beaucaire, "of what are you afraid? You calculate well. Beaucaire might have been belief'—an impostor that you yourself expose'? Never! But I was not goin' reveal that secret. You have not absolve me of my promise."

"Tell what you like," answered the Duke. "Tell all the wild lies you have time for. You have five minutes to make up your mind to go quietly."

"Now you absolve me, then? Ha, ha! Oh, yes! Mademoiselle," he bowed to Lady Mary, "I have the honor to reques' you leave the room. You shall miss no details if these frien's of yours kill me, on the honor of a French gentleman."

"A French what?" laughed Bantison.

"Do you dare keep up the pretense?" cried Lord Townbrake. "Know, you villain barber, that your master, the Marquis de Mirepoix, is in the next room."

Molyneux heaved a great sigh of relief. "Shall I—" He turned to M. Beaucaire.

The young man laughed, and said: "Tell him come here at once."

"Impudent to the last!" cried Bantison, as Molyneux hurried from the room.

"Now you goin' to see M. Beaucaire's master," said Beaucaire to Lady Mary. "'Tis true what I say, the other night. I cross from France in his suite; my passport say as his barber. Then to pass the *ennui* of exile, I come to Bath and play for what one will. It kill the time. But when the people hear I have been a servant they come only secretly; and there is one of them—he has absolve' me of a promise not to speak—of him I learn something he cannot wish to be tol'. I make some trouble to learn this thing. Why I should do this? Well—that is my own rizzon. So I make this man help me in a masque, the unmasking it was, for, as there is no one to know me, I throw off

my black wig and become myself—and so I am 'Chateaurien,' Castle Nowhere. Then this man I use', this Winterset, he——"

"I have great need to deny these accusations?" said the Duke.

"Nay," said Lady Mary wearily.

"Shall I tell you why I mus' be 'Victor' and 'Beaucaire' and 'Chateaurien,' and not myself?"

"To escape from the bailiffs for debts for razors and soap," gibed Lord Townbrake.

"No, monsieur. In France I have got a cousin who is a man with a very bad temper at some time', and he will never enjoy his relatives to do what he does not wish——"

He was interrupted by a loud commotion from without. The door was flung open, and the young Count of Beaujolais bounded in and threw his arms about the neck of M. Beaucaire.

"Philippe!" he cried. "My brother, I have come to take you back with me."

M. de Mirepoix followed him, bowing as a courtier, in deference; but M. Beaucaire took both his hands heartily. Molyneux came after, with Mr. Nash, and closed the door.

"My warmest felicitations," said the Marquis. "There is no longer need for your incognito."

"Thou best of masters!" said Beaucaire, touching him fondly on the shoulder. "I know. Your courier came safely. And so I am forgiven! But I forget." He turned to the lady. She had begun to tremble exceedingly. "Faires' of all the English fair," he said, as the gentlemen bowed low to her deep courtesy, "I beg the honor to presen' to Lady Mary Carlisle, M. le Comte de Beaujolais. M. de Mirepoix has already the honor. Lady Mary has been very kind to me, my frien's; you mus' help me make my acknowledgment. Mademoiselle and gentlemen, will you give me that favor to detain you one instan'?"

"Henri," he turned to the young Beaujolais, "I wish you had shared my masque—I have been so gay!" The surface of his tone was merry, but there was an undercurrent, weary-sad, to speak of what was the mood, not the manner. He made the effect of addressing every one present, but he looked steadily at Lady Mary. Her eyes were fixed upon him, with a silent and frightened fascination, and she trembled more and more. "I am a great actor, Henri. These gentlemen are

yet scarce convince' I am not a lackey! And I mus' tell you that I was jus' now to be expelled for having been a barber!"

"Oh, no!" the ambassador cried out. "He would not be content with me; he would wander over a strange country."

"Ha, ha, my Mirepoix! And what is better, one evening I am oblige' to fight some frien's of M. de Winterset there, and some ladies and cavaliers look on, and they still think me a servant. Oh, I am a great actor! 'Tis true there is not a peasant in France who would not have then known one 'born'; but they are wonderful, this English people, holding by an idea once it is in their heads —a mos' worthy quality. But my good Molyneux here, he had speak to me with courtesy, jus' because I am a man an' jus' because he is al—ways kind. (I have learn' that his great-grandfather was a Frenchman.) So I sen' to him and tell him ev'rything, and he gain admittance for me here to-night to await my frien's.

"I was speaking to messieurs about my cousin, who will meddle in the affair' of his relativ'. Well, that gentleman, he make a marriage for me with a good and accomplish' lady, very noble and very

beautiful—and amiable." (The young count at his elbow started slightly at this, but immediately appeared to wrap himself in a mantle of solemn thought.) "Unfortunately, when my cousin arrange' so, I was a dolt, a little blockhead; I swear to marry for myself and when I please, or never if I like. That lady is all things charming and gentle, and, in truth, she is—very much attach' to me—why should I not say it? I am so proud of it. She is very faithful and forgiving and sweet; she would be the same, I think, if I—were even—a lackey. But I? I was a dolt, a little unsensible brute; I did not value such thing' then; I was too yo'ng, las' June. So I say to my cousin, 'No, I make my own choosing!' 'Little fool,' he answer, 'she is the one for you. Am I not wiser than you?' And he was very angry, and, as he has influence in France, word come' that he will get me put in Vincennes, so I mus' run away quick till his anger is gone. My good frien' Mirepoix is jus' leaving for London; he take' many risk' for my sake; his hairdresser die before he start', so I travel as that poor barber. But my cousin is a man to be afraid of when he is angry, even in England, and I mus' not get my Mirepoix in trouble. I mus' not be

discover' till my cousin is ready to laugh about it all and make it a joke. And there may be spies; so I change my name again, and come to Bath to amuse my retreat with a little gaming—I am al—ways fond of that. But three day' ago M. le Marquis send me a courier to say that my brother, who know where I had run away, is come from France to say that my cousin is appease'; he need me for his little theatre, the play cannot go on. I do not need to espouse mademoiselle. All shall be forgiven if I return, and my brother and M. de Mirepoix will meet me in Bath to felicitate.

"There is one more thing to say, that is all. I have said I learn' a secret, and use it to make a man introduce me if I will not tell. He has absolve' me of that promise. My fren's, I had not the wish to ruin that man. I was not receive'; *Meestaire* Nash had reboff me; I had no other way excep' to use this fellow. So I say, 'Take me to Lady Malbourne's ball as "Chateaurien."' I throw off my wig, and shave, and behol', I am M. le Duc de Castle Nowhere. Ha, ha! You see?"

The young man's manner suddenly changed. He became haughty, menacing. He stretched out

his arm, and pointed at Winterset. "Now I am no 'Beaucaire,' messieurs. I am a French gentleman. The man who introduce' me at the price of his honor, and then betray' me to redeem it, is that coward, that card-cheat there!"

Winterset made a horrible effort to laugh. The gentlemen who surrounded him fell away as from pestilence. "A French gentleman!" he sneered savagely, and yet fearfully. "I don't know who you are. Hide behind as many toys and ribbons as you like; I'll know the name of the man who dares bring such a charge!"

"Sir!" cried de Mirepoix sharply, advancing a step towards him; but he checked himself at once. He made a low bow of state, first to the young Frenchman, then to Lady Mary and the company. "Permit me, Lady Mary and gentlemen," he said, "to assume the honor of presenting you to His Highness, Prince Louis-Philippe de Valois, Duke of Orleans, Duke of Chartres, Duke of Nemours, Duke of Montpensier, First Prince of the Blood Royal, First Peer of France, Lieutenant-General of French Infantry, Governor of Dauphiné, Knight of the Golden Fleece, Grand Master of the Order of Notre Dame, of Mount Carmel, and of St. Lazarus

in Jerusalem; and cousin to His most Christian Majesty, Louis the Fifteenth, King of France."

"Those are a few of my brother's names," whispered Henri of Beaujolais to Molyneux. "Old Mirepoix has the long breath, but it take' a strong man two day' to say all of them. I can suppose this Winterset know' now who bring the charge!"

"Castle Nowhere!" gasped Beau Nash, falling back upon the burly prop of Mr. Bantison's shoulder.

"The Duke of Orleans will receive a message from me within the hour!" said Winterset, as he made his way to the door. His face was black with rage and shame.

"I tol' you that I would not soil my hand with you," answered the young man. "If you send a message no gentleman will bring it. Whoever shall bear it will receive a little beating from Francois."

He stepped to Lady Mary's side. Her head was bent low, her face averted. She seemed to breathe with difficulty, and leaned heavily upon a chair. "Monseigneur," she faltered in a half whisper, "can you—forgive me? It is a bitter—mistake—I have made. Forgive."

"Forgive?" he answered, and his voice was as broken as hers; but he went on, more firmly: "It

is—nothing—less than nothing. There is—only jus' one—in the—whole worl' who would not have treat' me the way that you treat' me. It is to her that I am goin' to make reparation. You know something, Henri? I am not goin' back only because the king forgive' me. I am goin' to *please* him; I am goin' to espouse mademoiselle, our cousin. My frien's, I ask your felicitations."

"And the king does not compel him!" exclaimed young Henri.

"Henri, you want to fight me?" cried his brother sharply. "Don' you think the King of France is a wiser man than me?"

He offered his hand to Lady Mary.

"Mademoiselle is fatigue'. Will she honor me?"

He walked with her to the door, her hand fluttering faintly in his. From somewhere about the garments of one of them a little cloud of faded rose-leaves fell, and lay strewn on the floor behind them. He opened the door, and the lights shone on a multitude of eager faces turned toward it. There was a great hum of voices, and, over all, the fiddles wove a wandering air, a sweet French song of the *voyageur*.

He bowed very low, as, with fixed and glistening eyes, Lady Mary Carlisle, the Beauty of Bath, passed slowly by him and went out of the room.

THE END

THE BEAUTIFUL LADY

CHAPTER I

NOTHING could have been more painful to my sensitiveness than to occupy myself, confused with blushes, at the centre of the whole world as a living advertisement of the least amusing ballet in Paris.

To be the day's sensation of the boulevards one must possess an eccentricity of appearance conceived by nothing short of genius; and my misfortunes had reduced me to present such to all eyes seeking mirth. It was not that I was one of those people in uniform who carry placards and strange figures upon their backs, nor that my coat was of rags; on the contrary, my whole costume was delicately rich and well chosen, of soft grey and fine linen (such as you see worn by a marquis in the pésage at Auteuil) according well with my usual air and countenance, sometimes esteemed to resemble my father's, which were not wanting in distinction.

To add to this, my duties were not exhausting to the body. I was required only to sit without a hat

from ten of the morning to midday, and from four until seven in the afternoon, at one of the small tables under the awning of the Café de la Paix at the corner of the Place de l'Opéra—that is to say, the centre of the inhabited world. In the morning I drank my coffee, hot in the cup; in the afternoon I sipped it cold in the glass. I spoke to no one; not a glance or gesture of mine passed to attract notice.

Yet I was the centre of that centre of the world. All day the crowds surrounded me, laughing loudly; all the *voyous* making those jokes for which I found no repartee. The pavement was sometimes blocked; the passing coachmen stood up in their boxes to look over at me, small infants were elevated on shoulders to behold me; not the gravest or most sorrowful came by without stopping to gaze at me and go away with rejoicing faces. The boulevards rang to their laughter—all Paris laughed!

For seven days I sat there at the appointed times, meeting the eye of nobody, and lifting my coffee with fingers which trembled from embarrassment at this too great conspicuosity! Those mournful hours passed, one by the year, while the idling bourgeois and the travellers made ridicule; and the rabble exhausted all effort to draw plays of wit from me.

I have told you that I carried no placard, that my costume was elegant, my demeanour modest in all degree.

"How, then, this excitement?" would be your disposition to inquire. "Why this sensation?"

It is very simple. My hair had been shaved off, all over my ears, leaving only a little above the back of the neck, to give an appearance of far-reaching baldness, and on my head was painted, in ah! so brilliant letters of distinctness:

Thêâtre
Folie-Rouge
Revue
de
Printemps
Tous les Soirs!

Such was the necessity to which I was at that time reduced! One has heard that the North-Americans invent the most singular advertising, but I will not believe they surpass the Parisian. Myself, I say I cannot express my sufferings under the notation of the crowds that moved about the Café de la Paix! The French are a terrible people when

they laugh sincerely. It is not so much the amusing things which cause them amusement; it is often the strange, those contrasts which contain something horrible, and when they laugh there is too frequently some person who is uncomfortable or wicked. I am glad that I was born not a Frenchman; I should regret to be native to a country where they invent such things as I was doing in the Place de l'Opéra; for, as I tell you, the idea was not mine.

As I sat with my eyes drooping before the gaze of my terrible and applauding audiences, how I mentally formed cursing words against the day when my misfortunes led me to apply at the Théâtre Folie-Rouge for work! I had expected an audition and a rôle of comedy in the *Revue;* for, perhaps lacking any experience of the stage, I am a Neapolitan by birth, though a resident of the Continent at large since the age of fifteen. All Neapolitans can act; all are actors; comedians of the greatest, as every traveller is cognizant. There is a thing in the air of our beautiful slopes which makes the people of a great instinctive musicalness and deceptiveness, with passions like those burning in the old mountain we have there. They are ready to play, to sing—or to explode, yet, imitating that

amusing Vesuvio, they never do this last when you are in expectancy, or, as a spectator, hopeful of it.

How could any person wonder, then, that I, finding myself suddenly destitute in Paris, should apply at the theatres? One after another, I saw myself no farther than the director's door, until (having had no more to eat the day preceding than three green almonds, which I took from a cart while the good female was not looking) I reached the Folie-Rouge. Here I was astonished to find a polite reception from the director. It eventuated that they wished for a person appearing like myself—a person whom they would outfit with clothes of quality in all parts, whose external presented a gentleman of the great world, not merely one of the *galant-uomini*, but who would impart an air to a table at a café where he might sit and partake. The contrast of this with the emplacement of the embellishment on his bald head-top was to be the success of the idea. It was plain that I had no baldness, my hair being very thick and I but twenty-four years of age, when it was explained that my hair could be shaved. They asked me to accept, alas! not a part in the *Revue*, but a specialty as a sandwich-man. Knowing the English tongue as

I do, I may afford the venturesomeness to play upon it a little: I asked for bread, and they offered me not a *rôle*, but a sandwich!

It must be undoubted that I possessed not the disposition to make any fun with my accomplishments during those days that I spent under the awning of the Café de la Paix, I had consented to be the advertisement in greatest desperation, and not considering what the reality would be. Having consented, honour compelled that I fulfil to the ending. Also, the costume and outfittings I wore were part of my emolument. They had been constructed for me by the finest tailor; and though I had impulses, often, to leap up and fight through the noisy ones about me and run far to the open country, the very garments I wore were fetters binding me to remain and suffer. It seemed to me that the hours were spent not in the centre of a ring of human persons, but of un-well-made pantaloons and ugly skirts. Yet all of these pantaloons and skirts had such scrutinous eyes and expressions of mirth to laugh like demons at my conscious, burning painted head; eyes which spread out, astonished at the sight of me, and peered and winked and grinned from the big wrinkles above the gaiters of

Zouaves, from the red breeches of the gendarmes, the knickerbockers of the cyclists, the white ducks of *sergents de ville*, and the knees of the boulevardiers, bagged with sitting cross-legged at the little tables. I could not escape these eyes;—how scornfully they twinkled at me from the spurred and glittering officers' boots! How with amaze from the American and English trousers, both turned up and creased like folded paper, both with some dislike for each other but for all other trousers more.

It was only at such times when the mortification to appear so greatly embarrassed became stronger than the embarrassment itself that I could by will power force my head to a straight construction and look out upon my spectators firmly. On the second day of my ordeal, so facing the laughers, I found myself glaring straight into the monocle of my half-brother and ill-wisher, Prince Caravacioli.

At this, my agitation was sudden and very great, for there was no one I wished to prevent perceiving my condition more than that old Antonio Caravacioli! I had not known that he was in Paris, but I could have no doubt it was himself: The monocle, the handsome nose, the toupée, the yellow

skin, the dyed-black moustache, the splendid height —it was indeed Caravacioli! He was costumed for the automobile, and threw but one glance at me as he crossed the pavement to his car, which was in waiting. There was no change, not of the faintest, in that frosted tragic mask of a countenance, and I was glad to think that he had not recognized me.

And yet, how strange that I should care, since all his life he had declined to recognize me as what I was! Ah, I should have been glad to shout his age, his dyes, his artificialities, to all the crowd, so to touch him where it would most pain him! For was he not the vainest man in the whole world? How well I knew his vulnerable point: the monstrous depth of his vanity in that pretence of youth which he preserved through superhuman pains and a genius of a valet, most excellently! I had much to pay Antonio for myself, more for my father, most for my mother. This was why that last of all the world I would have wished that old fortune-hunter to know how far I had been reduced!

Then I rejoiced about that change which my unreal baldness produced in me, giving me a look of forty years instead of twenty-four, so that my oldest friend must take at least three stares to know me.

Also, my costume would disguise me from the few acquaintances I had in Paris (if they chanced to cross the Seine), as they had only seen me in the shabbiest; while, at my last meeting with Antonio, I had been as fine in the coat as now.

Yet my encouragement was not so joyful that my gaze lifted often. On the very last day, in the afternoon when my observers were most and noisiest, I lifted my eyes but once during the final half-hour—but such a once that was!

The edge of that beautiful grey pongee skirt came upon the rim of my lowered eyelid like a cool shadow over hot sand. A *sergent* had just made many of the people move away, so there remained only a thin ring of the laughing pantaloons about me, when this divine skirt presented its apparition to me. A pair of North-American trousers accompanied it, turned up to show the ankle-bones of a rich pair of stockings; neat, enthusiastic and humorous, I judged them to be; for, as one may discover, my only amusement during my martyrdom—if this misery can be said to possess such alleviatings—had been the study of feet, pantaloons, and skirts. The trousers in this case detained my observation no time. They were but the darkest corner of the

chiaroscuro of a Rembrandt—the mellow glow of gold was all across the grey skirt.

How shall I explain myself, how make myself understood? Shall I be thought sentimentalistic or but mad when I declare that my first sight of the grey pongee skirt caused me a thrill of excitation, of tenderness, and—oh-i-me!—of self-consciousness more acute than all my former mortifications. It was so very different from all other skirts that had shown themselves to me those sad days, and you may understand that, though the pantaloons far outnumbered the skirts, many hundreds of the latter had also been objects of my gloomy observation.

This skirt, so unlike those which had passed, presented at once the qualifications of its superiority. It had been constructed by an artist, and it was worn by a lady. It did not pine, it did not droop; there was no more an atom of hanging too much than there was a portion inflated by flamboyancy; it did not assert itself; it bore notice without seeking it. Plain but exquisite, it was that great rarity—goodness made charming.

The peregrination of the American trousers suddenly stopped as they caught sight of me, and that

precious skirt paused, precisely in opposition to my little table. I heard a voice, that to which the skirt pertained. It spoke the English, but not in the manner of the inhabitants of London, who seem to sing undistinguishably in their talking, although they are comprehensible to each other. To an Italian it seems that many North-Americans and English seek too often the assistance of the nose in talking, though in different manners, each equally inagreeable to our ears. The intelligent among our lazzaroni of Naples, who beg from tourists, imitate this, with the purpose of reminding the generous traveller of his home, in such a way to soften his heart. But there is some difference: the Italian, the Frenchman, or German who learns English sometimes misunderstands the American: the Englishman he sometimes understands.

This voice that spoke was North-American. Ah, what a voice! Sweet as the mandolins of Sorrento! Clear as the bells of Capri! To hear it, was like coming upon sight of the almond-blossoms of Sicily for the first time, or the tulip-fields of Holland. Never before was such a voice!

"Why did you stop, Rufus?" it said.

"Look!" replied the American trousers; so that

I knew the pongee lady had not observed me of herself.

Instantaneously there was an exclamation, and a pretty grey parasol, closed, fell at my feet. It is not the pleasantest to be an object which causes people to be startled when they behold you; but I blessed the agitation of this lady, for what caused her parasol to fall from her hand was a start of pity.

"Ah!" she cried. "The poor man!"

She had perceived that I was a gentleman.

I bent myself forward and lifted the parasol, though not my eyes—I could not have looked up into the face above me to be Cæsar! Two hands came down into the circle of my observation; one of these was that belonging to the trousers, thin, long, and white; the other was the grey-gloved hand of the lady, and never had I seen such a hand—the hand of an angel in a suede glove, as the grey skirt was the mantle of a saint made by Doucet. I speak of saints and angels; and to the large world these may sound like cold words.—It is only in Italy where some people are found to adore them still.

I lifted the parasol toward that glove as I would have moved to set a candle on an altar. Then, at a thought, I placed it not in the glove, but in the

"Ah!" she cried. "The poor man!"

thin hand of the gentleman. At the same time the voice of the lady spoke to me—I was to have the joy of remembering that this voice had spoken four words to me.

"Je vous remercie, monsieur," it said.

"Pas de quoi!" I murmured.

The American trousers in a loud tone made reference in the idiom to my miserable head: "Did you ever see anything to beat it?"

The beautiful voice answered, and by the gentleness of her sorrow for me I knew she had no thought that I might understand. "Come away. It is too pitiful!"

Then the grey skirt and the little round-toed shoes beneath it passed from my sight, quickly hidden from me by the increasing crowd; yet I heard the voice a moment more, but fragmentarily: "Don't you see how ashamed he is, how he must have been starving before he did that, or that some one dependent on him needed—"

I caught no more, but the sweetness that this beautiful lady understood and felt for the poor absurd wretch was so great that I could have wept. I had not seen her face; I had not looked up—even when she went.

"Who is she?" cried a scoundrel *voyou*, just as she turned. "Madame of the parasol? A friend of monsieur of the ornamented head?"

"No. It is the first lady in waiting to his wife, *Madame la Duchesse*," answered a second. "She has been sent with an equerry to demand of monseigneur if he does not wish a little sculpture upon his dome as well as the colour decorations!"

"'Tis true, my ancient?" another asked of me.

I made no repartee, continuing to sit with my chin dependent upon my cravat, but with things not the same in my heart as formerly to the arrival of that grey pongee, the grey glove, and the beautiful voice.

Since King Charles the Mad, in Paris no one has been completely free from lunacy while the springtime is happening. There is something in the sun and the banks of the Seine. The Parisians drink sweet and fruity champagne because the good wines are already in their veins. These Parisians are born intoxicated and remain so; it is not fair play to require them to be like other human people. Their deepest feeling is for the arts; and, as every one has declared, they are farceurs in their tragedies, tragic in their comedies. They prepare the

last epigram in the tumbril; they drown themselves with enthusiasm about the alliance with Russia. In death they are witty; in war they have poetic spasms; in love they are mad.

The strangest of all this is that it is not only the Parisians who are the insane ones in Paris; the visitors are none of them in behaviour as elsewhere. You have only to go there to become as lunatic as the rest. Many travellers, when they have departed, remember the events they have caused there as a person remembers in the morning what he has said and thought in the moonlight of the night.

In Paris it is moonlight even in the morning; and in Paris one falls in love even more strangely than by moonlight.

It is a place of glimpses: a veil fluttering from a motor-car, a little lace handkerchief fallen from a victoria, a figure crossing a lighted window, a black hat vanishing in the distance of the avenues of the Tuileries. A young man writes a ballade and dreams over a bit of lace. Was I not, then, one of the least extravagant of this mad people? Men have fallen in love with photographs, those greatest of lairs; was I so wild, then, to adore this grey skirt, this small shoe, this divine glove, the golden-honey

voice—of all in Paris the only one to pity and to understand? Even to love the mystery of that lady and to build my dreams upon it?—to love all the more because of the mystery? Mystery is the last word and the completing charm to a young man's passion. Few sonnets have been written to wives whose matrimony is more than five years of age—is it not so?

CHAPTER II

WHEN my hour was finished and I in liberty to leave that horrible corner, I pushed out of the crowd and walked down the boulevard, my hat covering my sin, and went quickly. To be in love with my mystery, I thought, that was a strange happiness! It was enough. It was romance! To hear a voice which speaks two sentences of pity and silver is to have a chime of bells in the heart. But to have a shaven head is to be a monk! And to have a shaven head with a sign painted upon it is to be a pariah. Alas! I was a person whom the Parisians laughed at, not with!

Now that at last my martyrdom was concluded, I had some shuddering, as when one places in his mouth a morsel of unexpected flavour. I wondered where I had found the courage to bear it, and how I had resisted hurling myself into the river, though, as is known, that is no longer safe, for most of those who attempt it are at once rescued, arrested, fined,

and imprisoned for throwing bodies into the Seine, which is forbidden.

At the theatre the frightful badge was removed from my head-top and I was given three hundred francs, the price of my shame, refusing an offer to repeat the performance during the following week. To imagine such a thing made me a choking in my throat, and I left the bureau in some sickness. This increased so much (as I approached the Madeleine, where I wished to mount an omnibus) that I entered a restaurant and drank a small glass of cognac. Then I called for writing-papers and wrote to the good Mother Superior and my dear little nieces at their convent. I enclosed two hundred and fifty francs, which sum I had fallen behind in my payments for their education and sustenance, and I felt a moment's happiness that at least for a while I need not fear that my poor brother's orphans might become objects of charity—a fear which, accompanied by my own hunger, had led me to become the joke of the boulevards.

Feeling rich with my remaining fifty francs, I ordered the waiter to bring me a goulasch and a carafe of blond beer, after the consummation of which I spent an hour in the reading of a news-

paper. Can it be credited that the journal of my perusement was the one which may be called the North-American paper of the aristocracies of Europe? Also, it contains some names of the people of the United States at the hotels and elsewhere.

How eagerly I scanned those singular columns! Shall I confess to what purpose? I read the long lists of uncontinental names over and over, but I lingered not at all upon those like "Muriel," "Hermione," "Violet," and "Sibyl," nor over "Balthurst," "Skeffington-Sligo," and "Covering-Legge"; no, my search was for the Sadies and Mamies, the Thompsons, Van Dusens, and Bradys. In that lies my preposterous secret.

You will see to what infatuation those words of pity, that sense of a beautiful presence, had led me. To fall in love must one behold a face? Yes; at thirty. At twenty, when one is something of a poet—No: it is sufficient to see a grey pongee skirt! At fifty, when one is a philosopher—No: it is enough to perceive a soul! I had done both; I had seen the skirt; I had perceived the soul! Therefore, while hungry, I neglected my goulasch to read these lists of names of the United States again and again, only that I might have the thought that one of them

—though I knew not which—might be this lady's, and that in so infinitesimal a degree I had been near her again. Will it be estimated extreme imbecility in me when I ventured the additional confession that I felt a great warmth and tenderness toward the possessors of all these names, as being, if not herself, at least her compatriots?

I am now brought to the admission that before to-day I had experienced some prejudices against the inhabitants of the North-American republic, though not on account of great experience of my own. A year previously I had made a disastrous excursion to Monte Carlo in the company of a young gentleman of London who had been for several weeks in New York and Washington and Boston, and appeared to know very much of the country. He was never anything but tired in speaking of it, and told me a great amount. He said many times that in the hotels there was never a *concierge* or *portier* to give you information where to discover the best vaudeville; there was no *concierge* at all! In New York itself, my friend told me, a facchino, or species of porter, or some such good-for-nothing, had said to him, including a slap on the shoulder, "Well, brother, did you receive your delayed luggage

correctly?" (In this instance my studies of the North-American idiom lead me to believe that my friend was intentionally truthful in regard to the principalities, but mistaken in his observation of detail.) He declared the recent willingness of the English to take some interest in the United-Statesians to be a mistake; for they were noisy, without real confidence in themselves; they were restless and merely imitative instead of inventive. He told me that he was not exceptional; all Englishmen had thought similarly for fifty or sixty years; therefore, naturally, his opinion carried great weight with me. And myself, to my astonishment, I had often seen parties of these republicans become all ears and whispers when somebody called a prince or a countess passed by. Their reverence for age itself, in anything but a horse, had often surprised me by its artlessness, and of all strange things in the world, I have heard *them* admire old customs and old families. It was strange to me to listen, when I had believed that their land was the only one where happily no person need worry to remember who had been his great-grandfather.

The greatest of my own had not saved me from the decoration of the past week, yet he was as much

mine as he was Antonio Caravacioli's; and Antonio, though impoverished, had his motor-car and dined well, since I happened to see, in my perusal of the journal, that he had been to dinner the evening before at the English Embassy with a great company. "Bravo, Antonio! Find a rich foreign wife if you can, since you cannot do well for yourself at home!" And I could say so honestly, without spite, for all his hatred of me,—because, until I had paid my addition, I was still the possessor of fifty francs!

Fifty francs will continue life in the body of a judicial person a long time in Paris, and combining that knowledge and the good goulasch, I sought diligently for "Mamies" and "Sadies" with a revived spirit. I found neither of those adorable names—in fact, only two such diminutives, which are more charming than our Italian ones: a Miss Jeanie Archibald Zip and a Miss Fannie Sooter. None of the names was harmonious with the grey pongee—in truth, most of them were no prettier (however less processional) than royal names. I could not please myself that I had come closer to the rare lady; I must be contented that the same sky covered us both, that the noise of the same city rang in her ears as in mine.

Yet that was a satisfaction, and to know that it was true gave me mysterious breathlessness and made me hear fragments of old songs during my walk that night. I walked very far, under the trees of the Bois, where I stopped for a few moments to smoke a cigarette at one of the tables outside, at Armenonville. None of the laughing women there could be the lady I sought; and as my refusing to command anything caused the waiter uneasiness, in spite of my prosperous appearance, I remained but a few moments, then trudged on, all the long way to the Café de Madrid, where also she was not.

How did I assure myself of this since I had not seen her face? I cannot tell you. Perhaps I should not have known her; but that night I was sure that I should.

Yes, as sure of that as I was sure that she was beautiful!

CHAPTER III

NEARLY the whole of the next day, endeavouring to look preoccupied, I haunted the lobbies and vicinity of the most expensive hotels, unable to do any other thing, but ashamed of myself that I had not returned to my former task of seeking employment, although still reassured by possession of two louis and some silver. I dined well at a one-franc coachman's restaurant, where my elegance created not the slightest surprise, and I felt that I might live in this way indefinitely.

However, dreams often conclude abruptly, and two louis always do, as I found, several days later, when, after paying the rent for my unspeakable lodging and lending twenty francs to a poor, bad painter, whom I knew and whose wife was ill, I found myself with the choice of obtaining funds on my finery or not eating, either of which I was very loath to do. It is not essential for me to tell any person that when you seek a position it is better

that you appear not too greatly in need of it; and my former garments had prejudiced many against me, I fear, because they had been patched by a friendly *concierge*. Pantaloons suffer as terribly as do antiques from too obvious restorations; and while I was only grateful to the good woman's needle (except upon one occasion when she forgot to remove it), my costume had reached, at last, great sympathies for the shade of Praxiteles, feeling the same melancholy over original intentions so far misrepresented by renewals.

Therefore I determined to preserve my fineries to the uttermost; and it was fortunate that I did so; because, after dining for three nights upon nothing but looking out of my window, the fourth morning brought me a letter from my English friend. I had written to him, asking if he knew of any people who wished to pay a salary to a young man who knew how to do nothing. I place his reply in direct annexation:

"Henrietta Street, Cavendish Square, *May* 14.

"My dear Ansolini,—Why haven't you made some of your relatives do something? I understand that they do not like you; neither do my own, but after our crupper at Monte Carlo what could

mine do, except provide? If a few pounds (precious few, I fear!) be of any service to you, let me know. In the mean time, if you are serious about a position, I may, preposterously enough, set you in the way of it. There is an old thundering Yankee here, whom I met in the States, and who believed me a god because I am the nephew of my awful uncle, for whose career he has ever had, it appears, a life-long admiration, sir! Now, by chance, meeting this person in the street, it developed that he has need of a man, precisely such a one as you are not: a sober, tutorish, middle-aged, dissenting parson, to trot about the Continent tied to a dancing bear. It is the old gentleman's cub, who is a species of Caliban in fine linen, and who has taken a few too many liberties in the land of the free. In fact, I believe he is much a youth of my own kind with similar admiration for baccarat and good cellars. His father must return at once, and has decided (the cub's native heath and friends being too wild) to leave him in charge of a proper guide, philosopher, courier, chaplain, and friend, if such can be found, the same required to travel with the cub and keep him out of mischief. I thought of your letter directly, and I have given you the most tremendous recom-

mendation—part of it quite true, I suspect, though I am not a judge of learning. I explained, however, that you are a master of languages, of elegant though subdued deportment, and I extolled at length your saintly habits. Altogether, I fear there may have been too much of the virtuoso in my interpretation of you; few would have recognized from it the gentleman who closed a table at Monte Carlo and afterwards was closed himself in the handsome and spectacular fashion I remember with both delight and regret. Briefly, I lied like a master. He almost had me in the matter of your age; it was important that you should be middle-aged. I swore that you were at least thirty-eight, but, owing to exemplary habits, looked very much younger. The cub himself is twenty-four.

"Hence, if you are really serious and determined not to appeal to your people, call at once upon Mr. Lambert R. Poor, at the Hôtel d'Iéna. He is the father, and the cub is with him. The elder Yankee is primed with my praises of you, and must engage some one *at once*, as he sails in a day or two. Go—with my blessing, an air of piety, and as much age as you can assume. When the father has departed, throw the cub into the Seine, but preserve his

pocket-book, and we shall have another go at those infernal tables. Vale! J. G. S."

I found myself smiling—I fear miserably—over this kind letter, especially at the wonder of my friend that I had not appealed to my relatives. The only ones who would have liked to help me, if they had known I needed something, were my two little nieces who were in my own care; because my father, being but a poet, had no family, and my mother had lost hers, even her eldest son, by marrying my father. After that they would have nothing to do with her, nor were they asked. That rascally old Antonio was now the head of all the Caravacioli, as was I of my own outcast branch of our house—that is, of my two little nieces and myself. It was partly of these poor infants I had thought when I took what was left of my small inheritance to Monte Carlo, hoping, since I seemed to be incapable of increasing it in any other way, that number seventeen and black would hand me over a fortune as a waiter does wine. Alas! Luck is not always a fool's servant, and the kind of fortune she handed me was of that species the waiter brings you in the other bottle of champagne, the gold of a

bubbling brain, lasting an hour. After this there is always something evil to one's head, and mine, alas! was shaved.

Half an hour after I had read the letter, the little paper-flower makers in the attic window across from mine may have seen me shaving it—without pleasure—again. What else was I to do? I could not well expect to be given the guardianship of an erring young man if I presented myself to his parent as a gentleman who had been sitting at the Café de la Paix with his head painted. I could not wear my hat through the interview. I could not exhibit the thick five days' stubble, to appear in contrast with the heavy fringe that had been spared;—I could not trim the fringe to the shortness of the stubble; I should have looked like Pierrot. I had only, then, to remain bald, and, if I obtained the post, to shave in secret—a harmless and mournful imposition.

It was well for me that I came to this determination. I believe it was the appearance of maturity which my head and dining upon thoughts lent me, as much as my friend's praises, which created my success with the amiable Mr. Lambert R. Poor. I witness that my visit to him provided one of the

most astonishing interviews of my life. He was an instance of those strange beings of the Western republic, at whom we are perhaps too prone to pass from one of ourselves to another the secret smile, because of some little imperfections of manner. It is a type which has grown more and more familiar to us, yet never less strange: the man in costly but severe costume, big, with a necessary great waistcoat, not noticing the loudness of his own voice; as ignorant of the thousand tiny things which we observe and feel as he would be careless of them (except for his wife) if he knew. We laugh at him, sometimes even to his face, and he does not perceive it. We are a little afraid that he is too large to see it; hence too large for us to comprehend, and in spite of our laughter we are always conscious of a force—yes, of a presence! We jeer slyly, but we respect, fear a little, and would trust.

Such was my patron. He met me with a kind greeting, looked at me very earnestly, but smiling as if he understood my good intentions, as one understands the friendliness of a capering poodle, yet in such a way that I could not feel resentment, for I could see that he looked at almost every one in the same fashion.

My friend had done wonders for me; and I made the best account of myself that I could, so that within half an hour it was arranged that I should take charge of his son, with an honorarium which gave me great rejoicing for my nieces and my accumulated appetite.

"I think I can pick men," he said, "and I think that you are the man I want. You're old enough and you've seen enough, and you know enough to keep one fool boy in order for six months."

So frankly he spoke of his son, yet not without affection and confidence. Before I left, he sent for the youth himself, Lambert R. Poor, Jr.,—not at all a Caliban, but a most excellent-appearing, tall gentleman, of astonishingly meek countenance. He gave me a sad, slow look from his blue eyes at first; then with a brightening smile he gently shook my hand, murmuring that he was very glad in the prospect of knowing me better; after which the parent defined before him, with singular elaboration, my duties. I was to correct all things in his behavior which I considered improper or absurd. I was to dictate the line of travel, to have a restraining influence upon expenditures; in brief, to control the young man as a governess does a child.

To all of his parent's instructions Poor Jr. returned a dutiful nod and expressed perfect acquiescence. The following day the elder sailed from Cherbourg, and I took up my quarters with the son.

CHAPTER IV

IT is with the most extreme mortification that I record my ensuing experiences, for I felt that I could not honourably accept my salary without earning it by carrying out the parent Poor's wishes. That first morning I endeavoured to direct my pupil's steps toward the Musée de Cluny, with the purpose of inciting him to instructive study; but in the mildest, yet most immovable manner, he proposed Longchamps and the races as a substitute, to conclude with dinner at La Cascade and supper at Maxim's or the Café Blanche, in case we should meet engaging company. I ventured the vainest efforts to reason with him, making for myself a very uncomfortable breakfast, though without effect upon him of any visibility. His air was uninterruptedly mild and modest; he rarely lifted his eyes, but to my most earnest argument replied only by ordering more eggs and saying in a chastened voice:

"Oh no; it is always best to begin school with a vacation. To Longchamps—we!"

I should say at once that through this young man I soon became an amateur of the remarkable North-American idioms, of humour and incomparable brevities often more interesting than those evolved by the thirteen or more dialects of my own Naples. Even at our first breakfast I began to catch lucid glimpses of the intention in many of his almost incomprehensible statements. I was able, even, to penetrate his meaning when he said that although he was "strong for aged parent," he himself had suffered much anguish from overwork of the "earnest youth racquette" in his late travels, and now desired to "create considerable trouble for Paris."

Naturally, I did not wish to begin by antagonizing my pupil—an estrangement at the commencement would only lead to his deceiving me, or a continued quarrel, in which case I should be of no service to my kind patron, so that after a strained interval I considered it best to surrender.

We went to Longchamps.

That was my first mistake; the second was to yield to him concerning the latter part of his programme; but opposition to Mr. Poor Jr. had a curious effect of inutility. He had not in the least

the air of obstinacy,—nothing could have been less like rudeness; he neither frowned nor smiled; no, he did not seem even to be insisting; on the contrary, never have I beheld a milder countenance, nor heard a pleasanter voice; yet the young man was so completely baffling in his mysterious way that I considered him unique to my experience.

Thus, when I urged him not to place large wagers in the pésage, his whispered reply was strange and simple—"Watch me!" This he conclusively said as he deposited another thousand-franc note, which, within a few moments, accrued to the French Government.

Longchamps was but the beginning of a series of days and nights which wore upon my constitution—not indeed with the intensity of mortification which my former conspicuosity had engendered, yet my sorrows were stringent. It is true that I had been, since the age of seventeen, no stranger to the gaieties and dissipations afforded by the capitals of Europe; I may say I had exhausted these, yet always with some degree of quiet, including intervals of repose. I was tired of all the great foolishnesses of youth, and had thought myself done with them. Now I found myself plunged into more uproarious waters

than I had ever known—I, who had hoped to begin a life of usefulness and peace, was forced to dwell in the midst of a riot, pursuing my extraordinary charge.

There is no need that I should describe those days and nights. They remain in my memory as a confusion of bad music, crowds, motor-cars and champagne of which Poor Jr. was a distributing centre. He could never be persuaded to the Louvre, the Carnavalet, or the Luxembourg; in truth, he seldom rose in time to reach the museums, for they usually close at four in the afternoon. Always with the same inscrutable meekness of countenance, each night he methodically danced the cake-walk at Maxim's or one of the Montmartre restaurants, to the cheers of acquaintances of many nationalities, to whom he offered libations with prodigal enormity. He carried with him, about the boulevards at night, in the highly powerful car he had hired, large parties of strange people, who would loudly sing airs from the Folie-Rouge (to my unhappy shudderings) all the way from the fatiguing Bal Bullier to the Café de Paris, where the waiters soon became affluent.

And how many of those gaily dressed and smiling ladies whose bright eyes meet yours on the veranda

of the Théâtre Marigny were provided with excessive suppers and souvenir fans by the inexhaustible Poor Jr.! He left a trail of pink hundred-franc notes behind him, like a running boy dropping paper in the English game; and he kept showers of gold louis dancing in the air about him, so that when we entered the various cafés or "American bars" a cheer (not vocal but to me of perfect audibility) went up from the hungry and thirsty and borrowing, and from the attendants. Ah, how tired I was of it, and how I endeavoured to discover a means to draw him to the museums, and to Notre Dame and the Pantheon!

And how many times did I unwillingly find myself in the too enlivening company of those pretty supper-girls, and what jokings upon his head-top did the poor bald gentleman not undergo from those same demoiselles with the bright eyes, the wonderful hats, and the fluffy dresses!

How often among those gay people did I find myself sadly dreaming of that grey pongee skirt and the beautiful heart that had understood! Should I ever see that lady? Not, I knew, alas! in the whirl about Poor Jr.! As soon look for a nun at the Café Blanche!

For some reason I came to be persuaded that she had left Paris, that she had gone away; and I pictured her—a little despairingly—on the borders of Lucerne, with the white Alps in the sky above her,—or perhaps listening to the evening songs on the Grand Canal, and I would try to feel the little rocking of her gondola, making myself dream that I sat at her feet. Or I could see the grey flicker of the pongee skirt in the twilight distance of cathedral aisles with a chant sounding from a chapel; and, so dreaming, I would start spasmodically, to hear the red-coated orchestra of a café blare out into "Bedelia," and awake to the laughter and rouge and blague which that dear pongee had helped me for a moment to forget!

To all places Poor Jr., though never unkindly, dragged me with him, even to make the balloon ascent at the Porte Maillot on a windy evening. Without embarrassment I confess that I was terrified, that I clung to the ropes with a clutch which frayed my gloves, while Poor Jr. leaned back against the side of the basket and gazed upward at the great swaying ball, with his hands in his pockets, humming the strange ballad that was his favorite musical composition:

"The prettiest girl I ever saw
Was sipping cider through a straw-aw-haw!"

In that horrifying basket, scrambling for a foothold while it swung through arcs that were gulfs, I believed that my sorrows approached a sudden conclusion, but finding myself again upon the secure earth, I decided to come to an understanding with the young man.

Accordingly, on the following morning, I entered his apartment and addressed myself to Poor Jr. as severely as I could (for, truthfully, in all his follies I had found no ugliness in his spirit—only a good-natured and inscrutable desire of wild amusement), reminding him of the authority his father had deputed to me, and having the venturesomeness to hint that the son should show some respect to my superior age.

To my consternation he replied by inquiring if I had shaved my head as yet that morning. I could only drop in a chair, stammering to know what he meant.

"Didn't you suppose I knew?" he asked, elevating himself slightly on his elbow from the pillow. "Three weeks ago I left my aged parent in London

and ran over here for a day. I *saw* you at the Café de la Paix, and even then I knew that it was shaved, not naturally bald. When you came here I recognized you like a shot, and that was why I was glad to accept you as a guardian. I've enjoyed myself considerably of late, and you've been the best part of it,—I think you are a wonderation! I wouldn't have any other governess for the world, but you surpass the orchestra when you beg me to respect your years! I will bet you four dollars to a lead franc piece that you are younger than I am!"

Imagine the completeness of my dismay! Although he spoke in tones the most genial, and without unkindness, I felt myself a man of tatters before him, ashamed to have him know my sorry secret, hopeless to see all chance of authority over him gone at once, and with it my opportunity to earn a salary so generous, for if I could continue to be but an amusement to him and only part of his deception of Lambert R. Poor, my sense of honour must be fit for the guillotine indeed.

I had a little struggle with myself, and I think I must have wiped some amount of the cold perspiration from my absurd head before I was able to make an answer. It may be seen what a coward I was,

and how I feared to begin again that search for employment. At last, however, I was in self-control, so that I might speak without being afraid that my voice would shake.

"I am sorry," I said. "It seemed to me that my deception would not cause any harm, and that I might be useful in spite of it—enough to earn my living. It was on account of my being very poor; and there are two little children I must take care of.—Well, at least, it is over now. I have had great shame, but I must not have greater."

"What do you mean?" he asked me, rather sharply.

"I will leave immediately," I said, going to the door. "Since I am no more than a joke, I can be of no service to your father or to you; but you must not think that I am so unreasonable as to be angry with you. A man whom you have beheld reduced to what I was, at the Café de la Paix, is surely a joke to the whole world! I will write to your father before I leave the hotel and explain that I feel myself unqualified—"

"You're going to write to him why you give it up!" he exclaimed.

"I shall make no report of espionage," I answered,

with, perhaps, some bitterness, "and I will leave the letter for you to read and to send, of yourself. It shall only tell him that as a man of honour I cannot keep a position for which I have no qualification."

I was going to open the door, bidding him adieu, when he called out to me.

"Look here!" he said, and he jumped out of bed in his pyjamas and came quickly, and held out his hand. "Look here, Ansolini, don't take it that way. I know you've had pretty hard times, and if you'll stay, I'll get good. I'll go to the Louvre with you this afternoon; we'll dine at one of the Duval restaurants, and go to that new religious tragedy afterwards. If you like, we'll leave Paris to-morrow. There's a little too much movement here, maybe. For God's sake let your hair grow, and we'll go down to Italy and study bones and ruins and delight the aged parent!—It's all right, isn't it?"

I shook the hand of that kind Poor Jr. with a feeling in my heart that kept me from saying how greatly I thanked him—and I was sure that I could do anything for him in the world!

CHAPTER V

THREE days later saw us on the pretty waters of Lake Leman, in the bright weather when Mont Blanc heaves his great bare shoulder of ice miles into the blue sky, with no mist-cloak about him. Sailing that lake in the cool morning, what a contrast to the champagne houp-la nights of Paris! And how docile was my pupil! He suffered me to lead him through the Castle of Chillon like a new-born lamb, and even would not play the little horses in the Kursaal at Geneva, although, perhaps, that was because the stakes were not high enough to interest him. He was nearly always silent, and, from the moment of our departure from Paris, had fallen into dreamfulness, such as would come over myself at the thought of the beautiful lady. It touched my heart to find how he was ready with acquiescence to the slightest suggestion of mine, and, if it had been the season, I am almost credulous that I could have conducted him to Baireuth to hear *Parsifal!*

There were times when his mood of gentle sorrow was so like mine that I wondered if he, too, knew a grey pongee skirt. I wondered over this so much, and so marvellingly, also, because of the change in him, that at last I asked him.

We had gone to Lucerne; it was clear moonlight, and we smoked on our little balcony at the Schweitzerhof, puffing our small clouds in the enormous face of the strangest panorama of the world, that august disturbation of the earth by gods in battle, left to be a land of tragic fables since before Pilate was there, and remaining the same after William Tell was not. I sat looking up at the mountains, and he leaned on the rail, looking down at the lake. Somewhere a woman was singing from *Pagliacci*, and I slowly arrived at a consciousness that I had sighed aloud once or twice, not so much sadly, as of longing to see that lady, and that my companion had permitted similar sounds to escape him, but more mournfully. It was then that I asked him, in earnestness, yet with the manner of making a joke, if he did not think often of some one in North America.

"Do you believe that could be, and I making the disturbance I did in Paris?" he returned.

"Yes," I told him, "if you are trying to forget her."

"I should think it might look more as if I were trying to forget that I wasn't good enough for her and that she knew it!"

He spoke in a voice which he would have made full of ease—"off-hand," as they say; but he failed to do so.

"That was the case?" I pressed him, you see, but smilingly.

"Looks a good deal like it," he replied, smoking much at once.

"So? But that is good for you, my friend!"

"Probably." He paused, smoking still more, and then said, "It's a benefit I could get on just as well without."

"She is in North America?"

"No; over here."

"Ah! Then we will go where she is. That will be even better for you! Where is she?"

"I don't know. She asked me not to follow her. Somebody else is doing that."

The young man's voice was steady, and his face, as usual, showed no emotion, but I should have been an Italian for nothing had I not understood

quickly. So I waited for a little while, then spoke of old Pilatus out there in the sky, and we went to bed very late, for it was our last night in Lucerne.

Two days later we roared our way out of the gloomy St. Gotthard and wound down the pass, out into the sunshine of Italy, into that broad plain of mulberries where the silk worms weave to enrich the proud Milanese. Ah, those Milanese! They are like the people of Turin, and look down upon us of Naples; they find us only amusing, because our minds and movements are too quick for them to understand. I have no respect for the Milanese, except for three things: they have a cathedral, a picture, and a dead man.

We came to our hotel in the soft twilight, with the air so balmy one wished to rise and float in it. This was the hour for the Cathedral; therefore, leaving Leonardo and his fresco for the to-morrow, I conducted my uncomplaining ward forth, and through that big arcade of which the people are so proud, to the Duomo. Poor Jr. showed few signs of life as we stood before that immenseness; he said patiently that it resembled the postals, and followed me inside the portals with languor.

It was all grey hollowness in the vast place. The

windows showed not any colour nor light; the splendid pillars soared up into the air and disappeared as if they mounted to heights of invisibility in the sky at night. Very far away, at the other end of the church it seemed, one lamp was burning, high over the transept. One could not see the chains of support nor the roof above it; it seemed a great star, but so much all alone. We walked down the long aisle to stand near to it, the darkness growing deeper as we advanced. When we came almost beneath, both of us gazing upward, my companion unwittingly stumbled against a lady who was standing silently looking up at this light, and who had failed to notice our approach. The contact was severe enough to dislodge from her hand her folded parasol, for which I began to grope.

There was a hurried sentence of excusation from Poor Jr., followed by moments of silence before she replied. Then I heard her voice in startled exclamation:

"Rufus, it is never *you*?"

He called out, almost loudly,

"Alice!"

Then I knew that it was the second time I had lifted a parasol from the ground for the lady of the

grey pongee and did not see her face; but this time I placed it in her own hand; for my head bore no shame upon it now.

In the surprise of encountering Poor Jr. I do not think she noticed that she took the parasol or was conscious of my presence, and it was but too secure that my young friend had forgotten that I lived. I think, in truth, I should have forgotten it myself, if it had not been for the leaping of my heart.

Ah, that foolish dream of mine had proven true: I knew her, I knew her, unmistaking, without doubt or hesitancy—and in the dark! How should I know at the mere sound of her voice? I think I knew *before* she spoke!

Poor Jr. had taken a step toward her as she fell back; I could only see the two figures as two shadows upon shadow, while for them I had melted altogether and was forgotten.

"You think I have followed you," he cried, "but you have no right to think it. It was an accident, and you've got to believe me!"

"I believe you," she answered gently. "Why should I not?"

"I suppose you want me to clear out again," he went on, "and I will; but I don't see why."

Her voice answered him out of the shadow: "It is only you who make a reason why. I'd give anything to be friends with you; you've always known that."

"Why can't we be?" he said, sharply and loudly. "I've changed a great deal. I'm very sensible, and I'll never bother you again—that other way. Why shouldn't I see a little of you?"

I heard her laugh then—happily, it seemed to me, —and I thought I perceived her to extend her hand to him, and that he shook it briefly, in his fashion, as if it had been the hand of a man and not that of the beautiful lady.

"You know I should like nothing better in the world—since you tell me what you do," she answered.

"And the other man?" he asked her, with the same hinting of sharpness in his tone. "Is that all settled?"

"Almost. Would you like me to tell you?"

"Only a little—please!"

His voice had dropped, and he spoke very quietly, which startlingly caused me to realize what I was doing. I went out of hearing then, very softly. Is it credible that I found myself trembling when I

reached the twilit piazza? It is true, and I knew that never, for one moment, since that tragic, divine day of her pity, had I wholly despaired of beholding her again; that in my most sorrowful time there had always been a little, little morsel of certain knowledge that I should some day be near her once more.

And now, so much was easily revealed to me: it was to see her that the good Lambert R. Poor, Jr., had come to Paris, preceding my patron; it was he who had passed with her on the last day of my shame, and whom she had addressed by his central name of Rufus, and it was to his hand that I had restored her parasol.

I was to look upon her face at last—I knew it—and to speak with her. Ah, yes, I did tremble! It was not because I feared she might recognize her poor slave of the painted head-top, nor that Poor Jr. would tell her. I knew him now too well to think he would do that, had I been even that other of whom he had spoken, for he was a brave, good boy, that Poor Jr. No, it was a trembling of another kind—something I do not know how to explain to those who have not trembled in the same way; and I came alone to my room in the hotel, still trembling

a little and having strange quickness of breathing in my chest.

I did not make any light; I did not wish it, for the precious darkness of the Cathedral remained with me—magic darkness in which I beheld floating clouds made of the dust of gold and vanishing melodies. Any person who knows of these singular things comprehends how little of them can be told; but to those people who do not know of them, it may appear all great foolishness. Such people are either too young, and they must wait, or too old—they have forgotten!

It was an hour afterward, and Poor Jr. had knocked twice at my door when I lighted the room and opened it to him. He came in, excitedly flushed, and, instead of taking a chair, began to walk quickly up and down the floor.

"I'm afraid I forgot all about you, Ansolini," he said, "but that girl I ran into is a—a Miss Landry, whom I have known a long—"

I put my hand on his shoulder for a moment and said:

"I think I am not so dull, my friend!"

He made a blue flash at me with his eyes, then smiled and shook his head.

"Yes, you are right," he answered, re-beginning his fast pace over the carpet. "It was she that I meant in Lucerne—I don't see why I should not tell you. In Paris she said she didn't want me to see her again until I could be—friendly—the old way—instead of something considerably different, which I'd grown to be. Well, I've just told her not only that I'd behave like a friend, but that I'd changed and felt like one. Pretty much of a lie that was!" He laughed, without any amusement. "But it was successful, and I suppose I can keep it up. At any rate we're going over to Venice with her and her mother to-morrow. Afterwards, we'll see them in Naples just before they sail."

"To Venice with them!" I could not repress crying out.

"Yes; we join parties for two days," he said, and stopped at a window and looked out attentively at nothing before he went on: "It won't be very long, and I don't suppose it will ever happen again. The other man is to meet them in Rome. He's a countryman of yours, and I believe—I believe it's—about —settled!"

He pronounced these last words in an even voice, but how slowly! Not more slowly than the con-

struction of my own response, which I heard myself making:

"This countryman of mine—who is he?"

"One of your kind of Kentucky Colonels," Poor Jr. laughed mournfully. At first I did not understand; then it came to me that he had sometimes previously spoken in that idiom of the nobles, and that it had been his custom to address one of his Parisian followers, a vicomte, as "Colonel."

"What is his name?"

"I can't pronounce it, and I don't know how to spell it," he answered. "And that doesn't bring me to the verge of the grave! I can bear to forget it, at least until we get to Naples!"

He turned and went to the door, saying, cheerfully: "Well, old horse-thief" (such had come to be his name for me sometimes, and it was pleasant to hear), "we must be dressing. They're at this hotel, and we dine with them to-night."

CHAPTER VI

HOW can I tell of the lady of the pongee—now that I beheld her? Do you think that, when she came that night to the salon where we were awaiting her, I hesitated to lift my eyes to her face because of a fear that it would not be so beautiful as the misty sweet face I had dreamed would be hers? Ah, no! It was the beauty which was in her heart that had made me hers; yet I knew that she was beautiful. She was fair, that is all I can tell. I cannot tell of her eyes, her height, her mouth; I saw her through those clouds of the dust of gold—she was all glamour and light. It was to be seen that every one fell in love with her at once; that the chef d'orchestre came and played to her; and the waiters—you should have observed them!—made silly, tender faces through the great groves of flowers with which Poor Jr. had covered the table. It was most difficult for me to address her, to call her "Miss Landry." It seemed impossible that she should have a name, or that I should speak to her except as "you."

Even, I cannot tell very much of her mother, except that she was adorable because of her adorable relationship. She was florid, perhaps, and her conversation was of commonplaces and echoes, like my own, for I could not talk. It was Poor Jr. who made the talking, and in spite of the spell that was on me, I found myself full of admiration and sorrow for that brave fellow. He was all gaieties and little stories in a way I had never heard before; he kept us in quiet laughter; in a word, he was charming. The beautiful lady seemed content to listen with the greatest pleasure. She talked very little, except to encourage the young man to continue. I do not think she was brilliant, as they call it, or witty. She was much more than that in her comprehension, in her kindness—her beautiful kindness!

She spoke only once directly to me, except for the little things one must say. "I am almost sure I have met you, Signor Ansolini."

I felt myself burning up and knew that the conflagration was visible. So frightful a blush cannot be prevented by will-power, and I felt it continuing in hot waves long after Poor Jr. had effected salvation for me by a small joke upon my cosmopolitanism.

Little sleep visited me that night. The darkness of my room was luminous and my closed eyes became painters, painting so radiatingly with divine colours —painters of wonderful portraits of this lady. Gallery after gallery swam before me, and the morning brought only more!

What a ride it was to Venice that day! What magical airs we rode through, and what a thieving old trickster was Time, as he always becomes when one wishes hours to be long! I think Poor Jr. had made himself forget everything except that he was with her and that he must be a friend. He committed a thousand ridiculousnesses at the stations; he filled one side of the compartment with the pretty chianti-bottles, with terrible cakes, and with fruits and flowers; he never ceased his joking, which had no tiresomeness in it, and he made the little journey one of continuing, happy laughter.

And that evening another of my foolish dreams came true! I sat in a gondola with the lady of the grey pongee to hear the singing on the Grand Canal; —not, it is true, at her feet, but upon a little chair beside her mother. It was my place—to be, as I had been all day, escort to the mother, and guide

and courier for that small party. Contented enough was I to accept it! How could I have hoped that the Most Blessed Mother would grant me so much nearness as that? It was not happiness that I felt, but something so much more precious, as though my heart-strings were the strings of a harp, and sad, beautiful arpeggios ran over them.

I could not speak much that evening nor could Poor Jr. We were very silent and listened to the singing, our gondola just touching the others on each side, those in turn touching others, so that a musician from the barge could cross from one to another, presenting the hat for contributions. In spite of this extreme propinquity, I feared the collector would fall into the water when he received the offering of Poor Jr. It was "*Gra-a-az', Mi-lor! Graz'!*" a hundred times, with bows and grateful smiles indeed!

It is the one place in the world where you listen to a bad voice with pleasure, and none of the voices are good—they are harsh and worn with the night-singing—yet all are beautiful because they are enchanted.

They sang some of our own Neapolitan songs that night, and last of all the loveliest of all, "La

Luna Nuova." It was to the cadence of it that our gondoliers moved us out of the throng, and it still drifted on the water as we swung, far down, into sight of the lights of the Lido:

"Luna d'ar-gen-to fal-lo so-gnar—
Ba-cia-lo in fron-te non lo de-star. . . ."

Not so sweetly came those measures as the low voice of the beautiful lady speaking then.

"One could never forget it, never!" she said. "I might hear it a thousand other times and forget them, but never this first time."

I perceived that Poor Jr. turned his face abruptly toward hers at this, but he said nothing, by which I understood not only his wisdom but his forbearance.

"Strangely enough," she went on, slowly, "that song reminded me of something in Paris. Do you remember"—she turned to Poor Jr.—"that poor man we saw in front of the Café de la Paix with the sign painted upon his head?"

Ah, the good night, with its friendly cloak! The good, kind night!

"I remember," he answered, with some shortness. "A little faster, boatman!"

"I don't know what made it," she said, "I can't account for it, but I've been thinking of him all through that last song."

Perhaps not so strange, since one may know how wildly that poor devil had been thinking of her!

"I've thought of him so often," the gentle voice went on. "I felt so sorry for him. I never felt sorrier for any one in my life. I was sorry for the poor, thin cab-horses in Paris, but I was sorrier for him. I think it was the saddest sight I ever saw. Do you suppose he still has to do that, Rufus?"

"No, no," he answered, in haste. "He'd stopped before I left. He's all right, I imagine. Here's the Danieli."

She fastened a shawl more closely about her mother, whom I, with a ringing in my ears, was trying to help up the stone steps. "Rufus, I hope," the sweet voice continued, so gently—"I hope he's found something to do that's very *grand!* Don't you? Something to make up to him for doing *that!*"

She had not the faintest dream that it was I. It was just her beautiful heart.

The next afternoon Venice was a bleak and empty setting, the jewel gone. How vacant it

looked, how vacant it *was!* We made not any effort to penetrate the galleries; I had no heart to urge my friend. For us the whole of Venice had become one bridge of sighs, and we sat in the shade of the piazza, not watching the pigeons, and listening very little to the music. There are times when St. Mark's seems to glare at you with Byzantine cruelty, and Venice is too hot and too cold. So it was then. Evening found us staring out at the Adriatic from the terrace of a café on the Ledo, our coffee cold before us. Never was a greater difference than that in my companion from the previous day. Yet he was not silent. He talked of her continually, having found that he could talk of her to me—though certainly he did not know why it was or how. He told me, as we sat by the grey-growing sea, that she had spoken of me.

"She liked you, she liked you very much," he said. "She told me she liked you because you were quiet and melancholy. Oh Lord, though, she *likes* every one, I suppose! I believe I'd have a better chance with her if I hadn't always known her. I'm afraid that this damned Italian—I beg your pardon, Ansolini!—"

"Ah, no," I answered. "It is sometimes well said."

"I'm afraid his picturesqueness as a Kentucky Colonel appeals to her too much. And then he is new to her—a new type. She only met him in Paris, and he had done some things in the Abyssinian war—"

"What is his rank?" I asked.

"He's a prince. Cheap down this way, aren't they? I only hope"—and Poor Jr. made a groan—"it isn't going to be the old story—and that he'll be good to her if he gets her."

"Then it is not yet a betrothal?"

"Not yet. Mrs. Landry told me that Alice had liked him well enough to promise she'd give him her answer before she sailed, and that it was going to be yes. She herself said it was almost settled. That was just her way of breaking it to me, I fear."

"You have given up, my friend?"

"What else can I do? I can't go on following her, keeping up this play at second cousin, and she won't have anything else. Ever since I grew up she's been rather sorrowful over me because I didn't do anything but try to amuse myself—that was one

of the reasons she couldn't care for me, she said, when I asked her. Now *this* fellow wins, who hasn't done anything either, except his one campaign. It's not that I ought to have her, but while I suppose it's a real fascination, I'm afraid there's a little glitter about being a princess. Even the best of our girls haven't got over that yet. Ah, well, about me she's right. I've been a pretty worthless sort. She's right. I've thought it all over. Three days before they sail we'll go down to Naples and hear the last word, and whatever it is we'll see them off on the 'Princess Irene.' Then you and I'll come north and sail by the first boat from Cherbourg."

"I—I?" I stammered.

"Yes," he said. "I'm going to make the aged parent shout with unmanly glee. I'm going to ask him to take me on as a hand. He'll take you, too. He uses something like a thousand Italians, and a man to manage them who can talk to them like a Dutch uncle is what he has always needed. He liked you, and he'll be glad to get you."

He was a good friend, that Poor Jr., you see, and I shook the hand that he offered me very hard,

knowing how great would have been his embarrassment had I embraced him in our own fashion.

"And perhaps you will sail on the 'Princess Irene,' after all," I cried.

"No," he shook his head sadly, "it will not happen. I have not been worth it."

CHAPTER VII

THAT Naples of mine is like a soiled coronet of white gems, sparkling only from far away. But I love it altogether, near or far, and my heart would have leaped to return to it for its own sake, but to come to it as we did, knowing that the only lady in the world was there. . . . Again, this is one of those things I possess no knowledge how to tell, and that those who know do know. How I had longed for the time to come, how I had feared it, how I had made pictures of it!

Yet I feared not so much as my friend, for he had a dim, small hope, and I had none. How could I have? I—a man whose head had been painted? I—for whom her great heart had sorrowed as for the thin, beaten cab-horses of Paris! Hope? All I could hope was that she might never know, and I be left with some little shred of dignity in her eyes!

Who cannot see that it was for my friend to fear? At times, with him, it was despair, but of that brave kind one loves to see—never a quiver of the

lip, no winking of the eyes to keep tears back. And I, although of a people who express everything in every way, I understood what passed within him and found time to sorrow for him.

Most of all, I sorrowed for him as we waited for her on the terrace of the Bertolini, that perch on the cliff so high that even the noises of the town are dulled and mingle with the sound of the thick surf far below.

Across the city, and beyond, we saw, from the terrace, the old mountain of the warm heart, smoking amiably, and the lights of Torre del Greco at its feet, and there, across the bay, I beheld, as I had nightly so long ago, the lamps of Castellamare, of Sorrento; then, after a stretch of water, a twinkling which was Capri. How good it was to know that all these had not taken advantage of my long absence to run away and vanish, as I had half feared they would. Those who have lived here love them well; and it was a happy thought that the beautiful lady knew them now, and shared them. I had never known quite all their loveliness until I felt that she knew it too. This was something that I must never tell her—yet what happiness there was in it!

I stood close to the railing, with a rambling gaze over this enchanted earth and sea and sky, while my friend walked nervously up and down behind me. We had come to Naples in the late afternoon, and had found a note from Mrs. Landry at our hotel, asking us for dinner. Poor Jr. had not spoken more than twice since he had read me this kind invitation, but now I heard a low exclamation from him, which let me know who was approaching; and that foolish trembling got hold of me again as I turned.

Mrs. Landry came first, with outstretched hand, making some talk excusing delay; and, after a few paces, followed the loveliest of all the world. Beside her, in silhouette against the white window lights of the hotel, I saw the very long, thin figure of a man, which, even before I recognized it, carried a certain ominousness to my mind.

Mrs. Landry, in spite of her florid contentedness, had sometimes a fluttering appearance of trivial agitations.

"The Prince came down from Rome this morning," she said nervously, and I saw my friend throw back his head like a man who declines the eye-bandage when they are going to shoot him.

"He is dining with us. I know you will be glad to meet him."

The beautiful lady took Poor Jr.'s hand, more than he hers, for he seemed dazed, in spite of the straight way he stood, and it was easy to behold how white his face was. She made the presentation of us both at the same time, and as the other man came into the light, my mouth dropped open with wonder at the singular chances which the littleness of our world brings about.

"Prince Caravacioli, Mr. Poor. And this is Signor Ansolini."

It was my half-brother, that old Antonio!

CHAPTER VIII

NEVER lived any person with more possession of himself than Antonio; he bowed to each of us with the utmost amiability; and for expression—all one saw of it was a little streak of light in his eye-glass.

"It is yourself, Raffaele?" he said to me, in the politest manner, in our own tongue, the others thinking it some commonplace, and I knew by his voice that the meeting was as surprising and as exasperating to him as to me.

Sometimes dazzling flashes of light explode across the eyes of blind people. Such a thing happened to my own, now, in the darkness. I found myself hot all over with a certain rashness that came to me. I felt that anything was possible if I would but dare enough.

"I am able to see that it is the same *your*self!" I answered, and made the faintest eye-turn toward Miss Landry. Simultaneously bowing, I let my hand fall upon my pocket—a language which he

understood, and for which (the Blessed Mother be thanked!) he perceived that I meant to offer battle immediately, though at that moment he offered me an open smile of benevolence. He knew nothing of my new cause for war; there was enough of the old!

The others were observing us.

"You have met?" asked the gentle voice of Miss Landry. "You know each other?"

"Exceedingly!" I answered, bowing low to her.

"The dinner is waiting in our own salon," said Mrs. Landry, interrupting. She led the way with Antonio to an open door on the terrace where servants were attending, and such a forest of flowers on the table and about the room as almost to cause her escort to stagger; for I knew, when I caught sight of them, that he had never been wise enough to send them. Neither had Poor Jr. done it out of wisdom, but because of his large way of performing everything, and his wish that loveliest things should be a background for that lady.

Alas for him! Those great jars of perfume, orchids and hyacinths and roses, almost shut her away from his vision. We were at a small round table, and she directly in opposition to him. Upon

her right was Antonio, and my heart grew cold to see how she listened to him.

For Antonio could talk. At that time he spoke English even better than I, though without some knowledge of the North-American idiom which my travels with Poor Jr. had given me. He was one of those splendid egoists who seem to talk in modesty, to keep themselves behind scenes, yet who, when the curtain falls, are discovered to be the heroes, after all, though shown in so delicate a fashion that the audience flatters itself in the discovery.

And how practical was this fellow, how many years he had been developing his fascinations! I was the only person of that small company who could have a suspicion that his moustache was dyed, that his hair was toupée, or that hints of his real age were scorpions and adders to him. *I* should not have thought it, if I had not known it. Here was my advantage; I had known his monstrous vanity all my life.

So he talked of himself in his various surreptitious ways until coffee came, Miss Landry listening eagerly, and my poor friend making no effort; for what were his quiet United States absurdities

compared to the whole-world gaieties and Abyssinian adventures of this Othello, particularly for a young girl to whom Antonio's type was unfamiliar? For the first time I saw my young man's brave front desert him. His mouth drooped, and his eyes had an appearance of having gazed long at a bright light. I saw that he, unhappy one, was at last too sure what her answer would be.

For myself, I said very little—I waited. I hoped and believed Antonio would attack me in his clever, disguised way, for he had always hated me and my dead brother, and he had never failed to prove himself too skilled for us. In my expectancy of his assault there was no mistake. I comprehended Antonio very well, and I knew that he feared I might seek to do him an injury, particularly after my inspired speech and gesture upon the terrace. Also, I felt that he would, if possible, anticipate my attempt and strike first. I was willing; for I thought myself in possession of his vulnerable point—never dreaming that he might know my own!

At last when he, with the coffee and cigarettes, took the knife in his hand, he placed a veil over the point. He began, laughingly, with the picture

of a pickpocket he had helped to catch in London. London was greatly inhabited by pickpockets, according to Antonio's declaration. Yet, he continued, it was nothing in comparison to Paris. Paris was the rendezvous, the world's home, for the criminals, adventurers, and rascals of the world, English, Spanish, South-Americans, North-Americans—and *even* Italians! One must beware of people one has met in Paris!

"Of course," he concluded, with a most amiable smile, "there are many good people there also. That is not to be forgotten. If I should dare to make a risk on such a trifle, for instance, I would lay a wager that you"—he nodded toward Poor Jr.—"made the acquaintance of Ansolini in Paris?"

This was of the greatest ugliness in its underneath significance, though the manner was disarming. Antonio's smile was so cheerful, his eyeglass so twinkling, that none of them could have been sure he truly meant anything harmful of me, though Poor Jr. looked up, puzzled and frowning.

Before he could answer I pulled myself together, as they say, and leaned forward, resting my elbows upon the table. "It is true," and I tried to smile

as amiably as Antonio. "These coincidences occur. You meet all the great frauds of the world in Paris. Was it not there"—I turned to Mrs. Landry—"that you met the young Prince here?"

At this there was no mistaking that the others perceived. The secret battle had begun and was *not* secret. I saw a wild gleam in Poor Jr.'s eyes, as if he comprehended that strange things were to come; but, ah, the face of distress and wonder upon Mrs. Landry, who beheld the peace of both a Prince and a dinner assailed; and, alas! the strange and hurt surprise that came from the lady of the pongee! Let me not be a boastful fellow, but I had borne her pity and had adored it—I could face her wonder, even her scorn.

It was in the flash of her look that I saw my great chance and what I must try to do. Knowiug Antonio, it was as if I saw her falling into the deep water and caught just one contemptuous glance from her before the waves hid her. But how much juster should that contempt have been if I had not tried to save her!

As for that old Antonio, he might have known enough to beware. I had been timid with him always, and he counted on it now, but a man who

has shown a painted head-top to the people of Paris will dare a great deal.

"As the Prince says," replied Mrs. Landry, with many flutters, "one meets only the most agreeable people in Paris!"

"Paris!" I exclaimed. "Ah, that home of ingenuity! How they paint there! How they live, and how they dye—their beards!"

You see how the poor Ansolini played the buffoon. I knew they feared it was wine, I had been so silent until now; but I did not care, I was beyond care.

"Our young Prince speaks truly," I cried, raising my voice. "He is wise beyond his years, this youth! He will be great when he reaches middle age, for he knows Paris and understands North America! Like myself, he is grateful that the people of your continent enrich our own! We need all that you can give us! Where should we be—any of us" (I raised my voice still louder and waved my hand to Antonio)—"where should we be, *either* of *us*" (and I bowed to the others) "without *you?*"

Mrs. Landry rose with precipitousness, and the beautiful lady, very red, followed. Antonio, unmistakably stung with the scorpions I had set

upon him, sprang to the door, the palest yellow man I have ever beheld, and let the ladies pass before him.

The next moment I was left alone with Poor Jr. and his hyacinth trees.

CHAPTER IX

FOR several minutes neither of us spoke. Then I looked up to meet my friend's gaze of perturbation.

A waiter was proffering cigars. I took one, and waved Poor Jr.'s hand away from the box of which the waiter made offering.

"Do not remain!" I whispered, and I saw his sad perplexity. "I know her answer has not been given. Will you present him his chance to receive it—just when her sympathy must be stronger for him, since she will think he has had to bear rudeness?"

He went out of the door quickly.

I did not smoke. I pretended to, while the waiters made the arrangements of the table and took themselves off. I sat there a long, long time waiting for Antonio to do what I hoped I had betrayed him to do.

It befell at last.

Poor Jr. came to the door and spoke in his steady voice. "Ansolini, will you come out here a moment?"

Then I knew that I had succeeded, had made Antonio afraid that I would do the thing he himself, in a panic, had already done—speak evil of another privately.

As I reached the door I heard him call out foolishly, "But, Mr. Poor, I beg you—"

Poor Jr. put his hand on my shoulder, and we walked out into the dark of the terrace. Antonio was leaning against the railing, the beautiful standing near. Mrs. Landry had sunk into a chair beside her daughter. No other people were upon the terrace.

"Prince Caravacioli has been speaking of you," said Poor Jr., very quietly.

"Ah?" said I.

"I listened to what he said; then I told him that you were my friend, and that I considered it fair that you should hear what he had to say. I will repeat what he said, Ansolini. If I mistake anything, he can interrupt me."

Antonio laughed, and in such a way, so sincerely, so gaily, that I was frightened.

"Very good!" he cried. "I am content. Repeat all."

"He began," Poor Jr. went on, quietly, though his hand gripped my shoulder to almost painfulness—"he began by saying to these ladies, in my presence, that we should be careful not to pick up chance strangers to dine, in Italy, and—and he went on to give me a repetition of his friendly warning about Paris. He hinted things for a while, until I asked him to say what he knew of you. Then he said he knew all about you; that you were an outcast, a left-handed member of his own family, an adventurer—"

"It is finished, my friend," I said, interrupting him, and gazed with all my soul upon the beautiful lady. Her face was as white as Antonio's or that of my friend, or as my own must have been. She strained her eyes at me fixedly; I saw the stars standing still in them, and I knew the moment had come.

"This Caravaciolo is my half-brother," I said.

Antonio laughed again. "Of what kind!"

Oh, he went on so easily to his betrayal, not knowing the United-Statesians and their sentiment, as I did.

"We had the same mother," I continued, as quietly as I could. "Twenty years after this young —this somewhat young—Prince was born she divorced his father, Caravacioli, and married a poor poet, whose bust you can see on the Pincian in Rome, though he died in the cheapest hotel in Sienna when my true brother and I were children. This young Prince would have nothing to do with my mother after her second marriage and—"

"Marriage!" Antonio laughed pleasantly again. He was admirable. "This is an old tale which the hastiness of our American friend has forced us to rehearse. The marriage was never recognized by the Vatican, and there was *not* twenty years—"

"Antonio, it is the *age* which troubles you, after all!" I said, and laughed heartily, loudly, and a long time, in the most good-natured way, not to be undone as an actor.

"Twenty years," I repeated. "But what of it? Some of the best men in the world use dyes and false—"

At this his temper went away from him suddenly and completely. I had struck the right point indeed!

"You cammorista!" he cried, and became only himself, his hands gesturing and flying, all his pleasant manner gone. "Why should we listen one second more to such a fisherman! The very seiners of the bay who sell dried sea-horses to the tourists are better gentlemen than you. You can shrug your shoulders! I saw you in Paris, though you thought I did not! Oh, I saw you well! Ah! *At the Cafe de la Paix!*"

At this I cried out suddenly. The sting and surprise of it were more than I could bear. In my shame I would even have tried to drown his voice with babblings, but after this one cry I could not speak for a while. He went on triumphantly:

"This rascal, my dear ladies, who has persuaded you to ask him to dinner, this camel who claims to be my excellent brother, *he*, for a few francs, in Paris, shaved his head and showed it for a week to the people with an advertisement painted upon it of the worst ballet in Paris. *This* is the gentleman with whom you ask Caravacioli to dine!"

It was beyond my expectation, so astonishing and so cruel that I could only look at him for a moment or two. I felt as one who dreams himself falling forever. Then I stepped forward and spoke,

in thickness of voice, being unable to lift my head:

"Again it is true what he says. I was that man of the painted head. I had my true brother's little daughters to care for. They were at the convent, and I owed for them. It also was partly for myself, because I was hungry. I could find not any other way, and so—but that is all."

I turned and went stumbling away from them.

In my agony that she should know, I could do nothing but seek greater darkness. I felt myself beaten, dizzy with beatings. That thing which I had done in Paris discredited me. A man whose head-top had borne an advertisement of the Folie-Rouge to think he could be making a combat with the Prince Caravacioli!

Leaning over the railing in the darkest corner of the terrace, I felt my hand grasped secondarily by that good friend of mine.

"God bless you!" whispered Poor Jr. "On my soul, I believe he's done himself. Listen!"

I turned. That beautiful lady had stepped out into the light from the salon door. I could see her face shining, and her eyes—ah me, how glorious they were! Antonio followed her.

"But wait," he cried, pitifully.

"*Not for you!*" she answered, and that voice of hers, always before so gentle, rang out as the Roman trumpets once rang from this same cliff. "Not for you! *I* saw him there with his painted head and I understood! *You* saw him there, and you did nothing to help him! And the two little children—*your* nieces, too,—and he your brother!"

Then my heart melted and I found myself choking, for the beautiful lady was weeping.

"Not for *you*, Prince Caravacioli," she cried, through her tears,—"*Not for you!*"

"Not for you, Prince Caravacioli," she cried, through her tears,—"Not for you!"

CHAPTER X

ALL of the beggars in Naples, I think, all of the flower-girls and boys, I am sure, and all the wandering serenaders, I will swear, were under our windows at the Vesuve, from six o'clock on the morning the "Princess Irene" sailed; and there need be no wonder when it is known that Poor Jr. had thrown handfuls of silver and five-lire notes from our balcony to strolling orchestras and singers for two nights before.

They wakened us with "Addio, la bella Napoli, addio, addio!" sung to the departing benefactor. When he had completed his toilet and his coffee, he showed himself on the balcony to them for a moment. Ah! What a resounding cheer for the signore, the great North-American nobleman! And how it swelled to a magnificent thundering when another largess of his came flying down among them!

Who could have reproved him? Not Raffaele Ansolini, who was on his knees over the bags and rugs! I think I even made some prolongation of

that position, for I was far from assured of my countenance, that bright morning.

I was not to sail in the "Princess Irene" with those dear friends. Ah no! I had told them that I must go back to Paris to say good-bye to my little nieces and sail from Boulogne—and I am sure they believed that was my reason. I had even arranged to go away upon a train which would make it not possible for me to drive to the dock with them. I did not wish to see the boat carry them away from me.

And so the farewells were said in the street in all that crowd. Poor Jr. and I were waiting at the door when the carriage galloped up. How the crowd rushed to see that lady whom it bore to us blushing and laughing! Clouds of gold-dust came before my eyes again; she wore once more that ineffable grey pongee!

Servants ran forward with the effects of Poor Jr., and we both sprang toward the carriage.

A flower-girl was offering a great basket of loose violets. Poor Jr. seized it and threw them like a blue rain over the two ladies.

"Bravo! Bravo!"

A hundred bouquets showered into the carriage,

and my friend's silver went out in another shower to meet them.

"Addio, la bella Napoli!" came from the singers and the violins, but I cried to them for "La Luna Nova."

"Good-bye—for a little while—good-bye!"

I knew how well my friend liked me, because he shook my hand with his head turned away. Then the grey glove of the beautiful lady touched my shoulder—the lightest touch in all the world—as I stood close to the carriage while Poor Jr. climbed in.

"God-bye. Thank you—and God bless you!" she said, in a low voice. And I knew for what she thanked me.

The driver cracked his whip like an honest Neapolitan. The horses sprang forward. "Addio, addio!"

"*Luna d'argento fallo sognar—*
Bacialo in fronte non lo destar,"

I sang with the musicians, waving and waving and waving my handkerchief to the departing carriage.

Now I saw my friend lean over and take the beautiful lady by the hand, and together they stood up in the carriage and waved their handkerchiefs to

me. Then, but not because they had passed out of sight, I could see them not any longer.

They were so good—that kind Poor Jr. and the beautiful lady; they seemed like dear children—as if they had been my own dear children.

THE END

HIS OWN PEOPLE

CHAPTER I

A CHANGE OF LODGING

THE glass-domed "palm-room" of the Grand Continental Hotel Magnifique in Rome is of vasty heights and distances, filled with a mellow green light which filters down languidly through the upper foliage of tall palms, so that the two hundred people who may be refreshing or displaying themselves there at the tea-hour have something the look of under-water creatures playing upon the sea-bed. They appear, however, to be unaware of their condition; even the ladies, most like anemones of that gay assembly, do not seem to know it; and when the Hungarian band (crustacean-like in costume, and therefore well within the picture) has sheathed its flying tentacles and withdrawn by dim processes, the tea-drinkers all float out through the doors, instead of bubbling up and away through the filmy roof. In truth, some such exit as that was imagined for them by a young man who remained in the aquarium after they had all gone, late one afternoon of last winter. They had been

marvelous enough, and to him could have seemed little more so had they made such a departure. He could almost have gone that way himself, so charged was he with the uplift of his belief that, in spite of the brilliant strangeness of the hour just past, he had been no fish out of water.

While the waiters were clearing the little tables, he leaned back in his chair in a content so rich it was nearer ecstasy. He could not bear to disturb the possession joy had taken of him, and, like a half-awake boy clinging to a dream that his hitherto unkind sweetheart has kissed him, lingered on in the enchanted atmosphere, his eyes still full of all they had beheld with such delight, detaining and smiling upon each revelation of this fresh memory—the flashingly lovely faces, the dreamily lovely faces, the pearls and laces of the anemone ladies, the color and romantic fashion of the uniforms, and the old princes who had been pointed out to him: splendid old men wearing white mustaches and single eye-glasses, as he had so long hoped and dreamed they did.

"Mine own people!" he whispered. "I have come unto mine own at last. Mine own people!" After long waiting (he told himself), he had seen them—

the people he had wanted to see, wanted to know, wanted to be *of!* Ever since he had begun to read of the "beau monde" in his schooldays, he had yearned to know some such sumptuous reality as that which had come true to-day, when, at last, in Rome he had seen—as he wrote home that night—"the finest essence of Old-World society mingling in Cosmopolis."

Artificial odors (too heavy to keep up with the crowd that had worn them) still hung about him; he breathed them deeply, his eyes half-closed and his lips noiselessly formed themselves to a quotation from one of his own poems:

> While trails of scent, like cobweb's films
> Slender and faint and rare,
> Of roses, and rich, fair fabrics,
> Cling on the stirless air,
> The sibilance of voices,
> At a wave of Milady's glove,
> Is stilled——

He stopped short, interrupting himself with a half-cough of laughter as he remembered the inspiration of these verses. He had written them three months ago, at home in Cranston, Ohio, the evening after Anna McCord's "coming-out tea." "Milady" meant Mrs. McCord; she had "stilled" the conversation of her guests when Mary Kramer (whom the

poem called a "sweet, pale singer") rose to sing Mavourneen; and the stanza closed with the right word to rhyme with "glove." He felt a contemptuous pity for his little, untraveled, provincial self of three months ago, if, indeed, it could have been himself who wrote verses about Anna McCord's "coming-out tea" and referred to poor, good old Mrs. McCord as "Milady"!

The second stanza had intimated a conviction of a kind which only poets may reveal:

> She sang to that great assembly,
> They thought, as they praised her tone;
> But she and my heart knew better:
> Her song was for me alone.

He had told the truth when he wrote of Mary Kramer as pale and sweet, and she was paler, but no less sweet, when he came to say good-by to her before he sailed. Her face, as it was at the final moment of the protracted farewell, shone before him very clearly now for a moment: young, plaintive, white, too lamentably honest to conceal how much her "God-speed" to him cost her. He came very near telling her how fond of her he had always been; came near giving up his great trip to remain with her always.

"Ah!" He shivered as one shivers at the thought of disaster narrowly averted. "The fates were good that I only came near it!"

He took from his breast-pocket an engraved card, without having to search for it, because during the few days the card had been in his possession the action had become a habit.

"Comtesse de Vaurigard," was the name engraved, and below was written in pencil: "To remember Monsieur Robert Russ Mellin he promise to come to tea Hotel Magnifique, Roma, at five o'clock Thursday."

There had been disappointment in the first stages of his journey, and that had gone hard with Mellin. Europe had been his goal so long, and his hopes of pleasure grew so high when (after his years of saving and putting by, bit by bit, out of his salary in a real-estate office) he drew actually near the shining horizon. But London, his first stopping-place, had given him some dreadful days. He knew nobody, and had not understood how heavily sheer loneliness —which was something he had never felt until then—would weigh upon his spirits. In Cranston, where the young people "grew up together," and

where he met a dozen friends on the street in a half-hour's walk, he often said that he "liked to be alone with himself." London, after his first excitement in merely being there, taught him his mistake, chilled him with weeks of forbidding weather, puzzled and troubled him.

He was on his way to Paris when (as he recorded in his journal) a light came into his life. This illumination first shone for him by means of one Cooley, son and inheritor of all that had belonged to the late great Cooley, of Cooley Mills, Connecticut. Young Cooley, a person of cherry manners and bright waistcoats, was one of Mellin's few sea-acquaintances; they had played shuffle-board together on the steamer during odd half-hours when Mr. Cooley found it possible to absent himself from poker in the smoking-room; and they encountered each other again on the channel boat crossing to Calais.

"*Hey!*" was Mr. Cooley's lively greeting. "I 'm meetin' lots of people I know, to-day. You runnin' over to Paris, too? Come up to the boat-deck and meet the Countess de Vaurigard."

"Who?" said Mellin, red with pleasure, yet fearing that he did not hear aright.

"The Countess de Vaurigard. Queen! met her in

"The Comtesse de Vaurigard"

London. Sneyd introduced me to her. You remember Sneyd on the steamer? Baldish Englishman—red nose—doesn't talk much—younger brother of Lord Rugden, so he says. Played poker some. Well, *yes!*"

"I saw him. I did n't meet him."

"You did n't miss a whole lot. Fact is, before we landed I almost had him sized up for queer, but when he introduced me to the Countess I saw my mistake. He must be the real thing. *She* certainly is! You come along up and see."

So Mellin followed, to make his bow before a thin, dark, charmingly pretty young woman, who smiled up at him from her deck-chair through an enhancing mystery of veils; and presently he found himself sitting beside her. He could not help trembling slightly at first, but he would have given a great deal if, by some miraculous vision, Mary Kramer and other friends of his in Cranston could have seen him engaged in what he thought of as "conversational badinage" with the Comtesse de Vaurigard.

Both the lady and her name thrilled him. He thought he remembered the latter in Froissart: it conjured up "baronial halls" and "donjon keeps," rang resonantly in his mind like "Let the portcullis

fall!" At home he had been wont to speak of the "oldest families in Cranston," complaining of the invasions of "new people" into the social territory of the McCords and Mellins and Kramers—a pleasant conception which the presence of a De Vaurigard revealed to him as a petty and shameful fiction; and yet his humility, like his little fit of trembling, was of short duration, for the gay geniality of Madame de Vaurigard put him amazingly at ease.

At Calais young Cooley (with a matter-of-course air, and not seeming to feel the need of asking permission) accompanied her to a compartment, and Mellin walked with them to the steps of the coach, where he paused, murmuring some words of farewell.

Madame de Vaurigard turned to him with a prettily assumed dismay.

"What! You stay at Calais?" she cried, pausing with one foot on the step to ascend. "Oh! I am sorry for you. Calais is ter-rible!"

"No. I am going on to Paris."

"So? You have frien's in another coach which you wish to be wiz?"

"No, no, indeed," he stammered hastily.

"Well, my frien'," she laughed gayly, "w'y don' you come wiz us?"

Blushing, he followed Cooley into the coach, to spend five happy hours, utterly oblivious of the bright French landscape whirling by outside the window.

There ensued a month of conscientious sightseeing in Paris, and that unfriendly city afforded him only one glimpse of the Countess. She whizzed by him in a big touring-car one afternoon as he stood on an "isle of safety" at the foot of the Champs Elysées. Cooley was driving the car. The raffish, elderly Englishman (whose name, Mellin knew, was Sneyd) sat with him, and beside Madame de Vaurigard in the tonneau lolled a gross-looking man—unmistakably an American—with a jovial, red, smooth-shaven face and several chins. Brief as the glimpse was, Mellin had time to receive a distinctly disagreeable impression of this person, and to wonder how Heaven could vouchsafe the society of Madame de Vaurigard to so coarse a creature.

All the party were dressed as for the road, gray with dust, and to all appearances in a merry mood. Mellin's heart gave a leap when he saw that the Countess recognized him. Her eyes, shining under

a white veil, met his for just the instant before she was quite by, and when the machine had passed a little handkerchief waved for a moment from the side of the tonneau where she sat.

With that he drew the full breath of Romance.

He had always liked to believe that "*grandes dames*" leaned back in the luxurious upholstery of their victorias, landaulettes, daumonts or automobiles with an air of inexpressible though languid hauteur. The Newport letter in the Cranston Telegraph often referred to it. But the gayety of that greeting from the Countess' little handkerchief was infinitely refreshing, and Mellin decided that animation was more becoming than hauteur—even to a "*grande dame.*"

That night he wrote (almost without effort) the verses published in the Cranston Telegraph two weeks later. They began:

> *Marquise, ma belle,* with your kerchief of lace
> Awave from your flying car,
> And your slender hand—

The hand to which he referred was the same which had arrested his gondola and his heart simultaneously, five days ago, in Venice. He was on his way to the station when Madame de Vaurigard's

gondola shot out into the Grand Canal from a narrow channel, and at her signal both boats paused.

"Ah! but you fly away!" she cried, lifting her eyebrows mournfully, as she saw the steamer-trunk in his gondola. "You are goin' return to America?"

"No. I'm just leaving for Rome."

"Well, in three day' *I* am goin' to Rome!" She clapped her hands lightly and laughed. "You know this is three time' we meet jus' by chance, though that second time it was so quick—*pff!* like that—we didn't talk much togezzer! Monsieur Mellin," she laughed again, "I think we mus' be frien's. Three time'—an' we are both goin' to Rome! Monsieur Mellin, you believe in *Fate?*"

With a beating heart he did.

Thence came the invitation to meet her at the Magnifique for tea, and the card she scribbled for him with a silver pencil. She gave it with the prettiest gesture, leaning from her gondola to his as they parted. She turned again, as the water between them widened, and with her "*Au revoir*" offered him a faintly wistful smile to remember.

All the way to Rome the noises of the train beat out the measure of his Parisian verses:

Marquise, ma belle, with your kerchief of lace
Awave from your flying car—

He came out of his reverie with a start. A dozen men and women, dressed for dinner, with a gold-fish officer or two among them, swam leisurely through the aquarium on their way to the hotel restaurant. They were the same kind of people who had sat at the little tables for tea—people of the great world, thought Mellin: no vulgar tourists or "trippers" among them; and he shuddered at the remembrance of his *pension* (whither it was time to return) and its conscientious students of Baedeker, its dingy halls and permanent smell of cold food. Suddenly a high resolve lit his face: he got his coat and hat from the brass-and-blue custodian in the lobby, and without hesitation entered the "bureau."

"I 'm not quite satisfied where I am staying—where I 'm stopping, that is," he said to the clerk. "I think I 'll take a room here."

"Very well, sir. Where shall I send for your luggage?"

"I shall bring it myself," replied Mellin coldly, "in my cab."

He did not think it necessary to reveal the fact that he was staying at one of the cheaper *pensions*;

and it may be mentioned that this reticence (as well as the somewhat chilling, yet careless, manner of a gentleman of the "great world" which he assumed when he returned with his trunk and bags) very substantially increased the rate put upon the room he selected at the Magnifique. However, it was with great satisfaction that he found himself installed in the hotel, and he was too recklessly exhilarated, by doing what he called the "right thing," to waste any time wondering what the "right thing" would do to the diminishing pad of express checks he carried in the inside pocket of his waistcoat.

"Better live a fortnight like a gentleman," he said, as he tossed his shoes into a buhl cabinet, "than vegetate like a tourist for a year."

He had made his entrance into the "great world" and he meant to hold his place in it as one "to the manor born." Its people should not find him lacking: he would wear their manner and speak their language—no *gaucherie* should betray him, no homely phrase escape his lips.

This was the chance he had always hoped for, and when he fell asleep in his gorgeous, canopied bed, his soul was uplifted with happy expectations.

CHAPTER II

MUSIC ON THE PINCIO

THE following afternoon found him still in that enviable condition as he stood listening to the music on the Pincian Hill. He had it of rumor that the Fashion of Rome usually took a turn there before it went to tea, and he had it from the lady herself that Madame de Vaurigard would be there. Presently she came, reclining in a victoria, the harness of her horses flashing with gold in the sunshine. She wore a long ermine stole; her hat was ermine; she carried a muff of the same fur, and Mellin thought it a perfect finish to the picture that a dark gentleman of an appearance most distinguished should be sitting beside her. An Italian noble, surely!

She saw the American at once, nodded to him and waved her hand. The victoria went on a little way beyond the turn of the drive, drew out of the line of carriages, and stopped.

"Ah, Monsieur Mellin," she cried as he came up

"I am glad! I was so foolish yesterday I didn' give you the address of my little apartment an' I forgot to ask you what is your hotel. I tol' you I would come here for my drive, but still I might have lost you for ever. See what many people! It is jus' that Fate again."

She laughed, and looked to the Italian for sympathy in her kindly merriment. He smiled cordially upon her, then lifted his hat and smiled as cordially upon Mellin.

"I am so happy to fin' myself in Rome that I forget"—Madame de Vaurigard went on—"*ever'sing!* But now I mus' make sure not to lose you. What is your hotel?"

"Oh, the Magnifique," Mellin answered carelessly. "I suppose everybody that one knows stops there. One does stop there, when one is in Rome, does n't one?"

"Everybody go' there for tea, and to eat, sometime, but to *stay*—ah, that is for the American!" she laughed. "That is for you who are all so abomin-*ab*-ly rich!" She smiled to the Italian again, and both of them smiled beamingly on Mellin.

"But that is n't always our fault, is it?" said Mellin easily.

"Aha! You mean you are of the new generation, of the yo'ng American' who come over here an' try to spen' these immense fortune'—those '*pile*'—your father or your gran'father make! I know quite well. Ah?"

"Well," he hesitated, smiling, "I suppose it does look a little by way of being like that."

"Wicked fellow!" She leaned forward and tapped his shoulder chidingly with two fingers. "I know what you wish the mos' in the worl'—you wish to get into mischief. That is it! No, sir, I will jus' take you in han'!"

"When will you take me?" he asked boldly.

At this, the pleasant murmur of laughter—half actual and half suggested—with which she underlined the conversation, became loud and clear, as she allowed her vivacious glance to strike straight into his upturned eyes, and answered:

"As long as a little turn roun' the hill, *now*. Cavaliere Corni——"

To Mellin's surprise and delight the Italian immediately descended from the victoria without the slightest appearance of irritation; on the contrary, he was urbane to a fine degree, and, upon Madame de Vaurigard's formally introducing him

to Mellin, saluted the latter with grave politeness, expressing in good English a hope that they might meet often. When the American was installed at the Countess' side she spoke to the driver in Italian, and they began to move slowly along the ilex avenue, the coachman reining his horses to a walk.

"You speak Italian?" she inquired.

"Oh, not a great deal more than a smattering," he replied airily—a truthful answer, inasmuch as a vocabulary consisting simply of "*quanty costy*" and "*troppo*" cannot be seriously considered much more than a smattering. Fortunately she made no test of his linguistic attainment, but returned to her former subject.

"Ah, yes, all the worl' to-day know' the new class of American," she said—"*your* class. Many year' ago we have another class which Europe did n' like. That was when the American was terri-ble! He was the—what is that you call?—oh, yes; he 'make himself,' you say: that is it. My frien,' he was abomin-*able!* He brag'; he talk' through the nose; yes, and he was niggardly, rich as he was! But you, you yo'ng men of the new generation, you are gentlemen of the idleness; you are aristocrats, with polish an' with culture. An' yet you throw your money

away—yes, you throw it to poor Europe as if to a beggar!"

"No, no," he protested with an indulgent laugh which confessed that the truth was really "Yes, yes."

"Your smile betray' you!" she cried triumphantly. "More than jus' bein' guilty of that fault, I am goin' to tell you of others. You are not the ole-time—what is it you say?—Ah, yes, the 'goody-goody.' I have heard my great American frien', Honor-able Chanlair Pedlow, call it the Sonday-school. Is it not? Yes, you are not the Sonday-school yo'ng men, you an' your class!"

"No," he said, bestowing a long glance upon a stout nurse who was sitting on a bench near the drive and attending to twins in a perambulator. "No, we 're not exactly dissenting parsons."

"Ah, no!" She shook her head at him prettily. "You are wicked! You are up into all the mischief! Have I not hear what wild sums you risk at your game, that poker? You are famous for it."

"Oh, we play," he admitted with a reckless laugh, "and I suppose we do play rather high."

"High!" she echoed. "*Souzands!* But that is not all. Ha, ha, ha, naughty one! Have I not observe' you lookin' at these pretty creature', the

little contadina-girl, an' the poor ladies who have hire' their carriages for two lire to drive up and down the Pincio in their bes' dress an' be admire' by the yo'ng American while the music play'? Which one, I wonder, is it on whose wrist you would mos' like to fasten a bracelet of diamon's? Wicked, I have watch' you look at them——"

"No, no," he interrupted earnestly. "I have not once looked away from you, I *could n't!*"

Their eyes met, but instantly hers were lowered; the bright smile with which she had been rallying him faded, and there was a pause during which he felt that she had become very grave. When she spoke, it was with a little quaver, and the controlled pathos of her voice was so intense that it evoked a sympathetic catch in his own throat.

"But, my frien', if it should be that I cannot wish you to look so at me, or to speak so to me?"

"I beg your pardon!" he exclaimed, almost incoherently. "I did n't mean to hurt your feelings. I would n't do anything you 'd think ungentlemanly for the world!"

Her eyes lifted again to his with what he had no difficulty in recognizing as a look of perfect trust; but, behind that, he perceived a darkling sadness.

"I know it is true," she murmured—"I know. But you see there are time' when a woman has sorrow—sorrow of one kind—when she mus' be sure that there is only—only rispec' in the hearts of her frien's."

With that, the intended revelation was complete, and the young man understood, as clearly as if she had told him in so many words, that she was not a widow and that her husband was the cause of her sorrow. His quickened instinct marvelously divined (or else it was conveyed to him by some intangible method of hers) that the Count de Vaurigard was a very bad case, but that she would not divorce him.

"I know," he answered, profoundly touched. "I understand."

In silent gratitude she laid her hand for a second upon his sleeve. Then her face brightened, and she said gayly:

"But we shall not talk of *me!* Let us see how we can keep you out of mischief at leas' for a little while. I know very well what you will do to-night: you will go to Salone Margherita an' sit in a box like all the wicked Americans——"

"No, indeed, I shall not!"

"Ah, yes, you will!" she laughed. "But until dinner let me keep you from wickedness. Come to tea jus' wiz me, not at the hotel, but at the little apartment I have taken, where it is quiet. The music is finish', an' all those pretty girl' are goin' away, you see. I am not selfish if I take you from the Pincio now. You will come?"

CHAPTER III

GLAMOUR

IT was some fair dream that would be gone too soon, he told himself, as they drove rapidly through the twilight streets, down from the Pincio and up the long slope of the Quirinal. They came to a stop in the gray courtyard of a palazzo, and ascended in a sleepy elevator to the fifth floor. Emerging, they encountered a tall man who was turning away from the Countess' door, which he had just closed. The landing was not lighted, and for a moment he failed to see the American following Madame de Vaurigard.

"Eow, it 's you, is it," he said informally. "Waitin' a devil of a long time for you. I 've gawt a message for you. *He 's* comin'. He writes that Cooley—"

"*Attention!*" she interrupted under her breath, and, stepping forward quickly, touched the bell. "I have brought a frien' of our dear, droll Cooley with me to tea. Monsieur Mellin, you mus' make

acquaintance with Monsieur Sneyd. He is English, but we shall forgive him because he is a such ole frien' of mine."

"Ah, yes," said Mellin. "Remember seeing you on the boat, running across the pond."

"Yes, ev coss," responded Mr. Sneyd cordially. "I waws n't so fawchnit as to meet you, but dyuh eold Cooley's talked ev you often. Heop I sh'll see maw of you hyuh."

A very trim, very intelligent-looking maid opened the door, and the two men followed Madame de Vaurigard into a square hall, hung with tapestries and lit by two candles of a Brobdingnagian species Mellin had heretofore seen only in cathedrals. Here Mr. Sneyd paused.

"I weon't be bawthring you," he said. "Just a wad with you, Cantess, and I 'm off."

The intelligent-looking maid drew back some heavy curtains leading to a salon beyond the hall, and her mistress smiled brightly at Mellin.

"I shall keep him to jus' his one word," she said, as the young man passed between the curtains.

It was a nobly proportioned room that he entered, so large that, in spite of the amount of old furniture it contained, the first impression it gave was one of

spaciousness. Panels of carved and blackened wood lined the walls higher than his head; above them, Spanish leather gleamed here and there with flickerings of red and gilt, reflecting dimly a small but brisk wood fire which crackled in a carved stone fireplace. His feet slipped on the floor of polished tiles and wandered from silky rugs to lose themselves in great black bear skins as in unmown sward. He went from the portrait of a "cinquecento" cardinal to a splendid tryptich set over a Gothic chest, from a cabinet sheltering a collection of old glass to an Annunciation by an unknown Primitive. He told himself that this was a "room in a book," and became dreamily assured that he was a man in a book. Finally he stumbled upon something almost grotesquely out of place: a large, new, perfectly-appointed card-table with a sliding top, a smooth, thick, green cover and patent compartments.

He halted before this incongruity, regarding it with astonishment. Then a light laugh rippled behind him, and he turned to find Madame de Vaurigard seated in a big red Venetian chair by the fire.

She wore a black lace dress, almost severe in fashion, which gracefully emphasized her slender-

ness; and she sat with her knees crossed, the firelight twinkling on the beads of her slipper, on her silken instep, and flashing again from the rings upon the slender fingers she had clasped about her knee.

She had lit a thin, long Russian cigarette.

"You see?" she laughed. "I mus' keep up with the time. I mus' do somesing to hold my frien's about me. Even the ladies like to play now—that breedge w'ich is so tiresome—they play, play, play! And you—you Americans, you refuse to endure us if we do not let you play. So for my frien's when they come to my house—if they wish it, there is that foolish little table. I fear"—she concluded with a bewitching affectation of sadness—"they prefer that to talkin' wiz me."

"You know that could n't be so, *Comtesse*," he said. "I would rather talk to you than—than——"

"Ah, yes, you say so, Monsieur!" She looked at him gravely; a little sigh seemed to breathe upon her lips; she leaned forward nearer the fire, her face wistful in the thin, rosy light, and it seemed to him he had never seen anything so beautiful in his life.

He came across to her and sat upon a stool at her feet. "On my soul," he began huskily, "I swear——"

She laid her finger on her lips, shaking her head gently; and he was silent, while the intelligent maid—at the moment entering—arranged a tea-table and departed.

"American an' Russian, they are the worse," said the Countess thoughtfully, as she served him with a generous cup, laced with rum, "but the American he is the bes' to play *wiz.*" Mellin found her irresistible when she said "wiz."

"Why is that?"

"Oh, the Russian play high, yes—but the American"—she laughed delightedly and stretched her arms wide—"*he* make' it all a joke! He is beeg like his beeg country. If he win or lose, *he* don' care! Ah, I mus' tell you of my great American frien', that Honor-able Chanlair Pedlow, who is comin' to Rome. You have heard of Honor-able Chanlair Pedlow in America?"

"I remember hearing that name."

"Ah, I shall make you know him. He is a man of distinction; he did sit in your Chamber of Deputies —what you call it?—yes, your Con-gress. He is funny, eccentric—always he roar like a lion—Boum!—but so simple, so good, a man of such fine heart—so lovable!"

"I 'll be glad to meet him," said Mellin coldly.

"An', oh, yes, I almos' forget to tell you," she went on, "your frien', that dear Cooley, he is on his way from Monte Carlo in his automobile. I have a note from him to-day."

"Good sort of fellow, little Cooley, in his way," remarked her companion graciously. "Not especially intellectual or that, you know. His father was a manufacturer chap, I believe, or something of the sort. I suppose you saw a lot of him in Paris?"

"Eh, I thought he is dead!" cried Madame de Vaurigard.

"The father is. I mean, little Cooley."

"Oh, yes," she laughed softly. "We had some gay times, a little party of us. We shall be happy here, too; you will see. I mus' make a little dinner very soon, but not unless you will come. You will?"

"Do you want me very much?"

He placed his empty cup on the table and leaned closer to her, smiling. She did not smile in response; instead, her eyes fell and there was the faintest, pathetic quiver of her lower lip.

"Already you know that," she said in a low voice.

She rose quickly, turned away from him and

walked across the room to the curtains which opened upon the hall. One of these she drew back.

"My frien,' you mus' go now," she said in the same low voice. "To-morrow I will see you again. Come at four an' you shall drive with me—but not—not more—*now*. Please!"

She stood waiting, not looking at him, but with head bent and eyes veiled. As he came near she put out a limp hand. He held it for a few seconds of distinctly emotional silence, then strode swiftly into the hall.

She immediately let the curtain fall behind him, and as he got his hat and coat he heard her catch her breath sharply with a sound like a little sob.

Dazed with glory, he returned to the hotel. In the lobby he approached the glittering concierge and said firmly:

"What is the Salone Margherita? Can you get me a box there to-night?"

CHAPTER IV

GOOD-FELLOWSHIP

HE confessed his wickedness to Madame de Vaurigard the next afternoon as they drove out the Appian Way. "A fellow must have just a bit of a fling, you know," he said; "and, really, Salone Margherita isn't so tremendously wicked."

She shook her head at him in friendly raillery. "Ah, that may be; but how many of those little dancing-girl' have you invite to supper afterward?"

This was a delicious accusation, and though he shook his head in virtuous denial he was before long almost convinced that he *had* given a rather dashing supper after the vaudeville and had *not* gone quietly back to the hotel, only stopping by the way to purchase an orange and a pocketful of horse-chestnuts to eat in his room.

It was a happy drive for Robert Russ Mellin, though not happier than that of the next day. Three afternoons they spent driving over the Cam-

pagna, then back to Madame de Vaurigard's apartment for tea by the firelight, till the enraptured American began to feel that the dream in which he had come to live must of happy necessity last forever.

On the fourth afternoon, as he stepped out of the hotel elevator into the corridor, he encountered Mr. Sneyd.

"Just stottin', eh?" said the Englishman, taking an envelope from his pocket. "Lucky I caught you. This is for you. I just saw the Cantess and she teold me to give it you. Herry and read it and kem on t' the Amairikin Baw. Chap I want you to meet. Eold Cooley's thyah too. Gawt in with his tourin'-caw at noon."

"You will forgive, dear friend," wrote Madame de Vaurigard, "if I ask you that we renounce our drive to-day. You see, I wish to have that little dinner to-night and must make preparation. Honorable Chandler Pedlow arrived this morning from Paris and that droll Mr. Cooley I have learn is coincidentally arrived also. You see I think it would be very pleasant to have the dinner to welcome these friends on their arrival. You will come surely—or I shall be so truly miserable. You know it perhaps too well! We shall have a happy evening if you come, to console us for renouncing our drive. A thousand of my prettiest wishes for you.

"HELENE."

The signature alone consoled him. To have that note from her, to own it, was like having one of her

"The Honorable Chandler Pedlow"

gloves or her fan. He would keep it forever, he thought; indeed, he more than half expressed a sentiment to that effect in the response which he wrote in the aquarium, while Sneyd waited for him at a table near by. The Englishman drew certain conclusions in regard to this reply, since it permitted a waiting friend to consume three long tumblers of brandy-and-soda before it was finished. However, Mr. Sneyd kept his reflections to himself, and, when the epistle had been dispatched by a messenger, took the American's arm and led him to the "American Bar" of the hotel, a region hitherto unexplored by Mellin.

Leaning against the bar were Cooley and the man whom Mellin had seen lolling beside Madame de Vaurigard in Cooley's automobile in Paris, the same gross person for whom he had instantly conceived a strong repugnance, a feeling not at once altered by a closer view.

Cooley greeted Mellin uproariously and Mr. Sneyd introduced the fat man. "Mr. Mellin, the Honorable Chandler Pedlow," he said; nor was the shock to the first-named gentleman lessened by young Cooley's adding, "Best feller in the world!"

Mr. Pedlow's eyes were sheltered so deeply be-

neath florid rolls of flesh that all one saw of them was an inscrutable gleam of blue; but, small though they were, they were not shifty, for they met Mellin's with a squareness that was almost brutal. He offered a fat paw, wet by a full glass which he set down too suddenly on the bar.

"Shake," he said, in a loud and husky voice, "and be friends! Tommy," he added to the attendant, "another round of Martinis."

"Not for me," said Mellin hastily. "I don't often—"

"*What!*" Mr. Pedlow roared suddenly. "Why, the first words Countess de Vaurigard says to me this afternoon was, 'I want you to meet my young friend Mellin,' she says; 'the gamest little Indian that ever come down the pike! He's game,' she says—'he'll see you *all* under the table!' That 's what the smartest little woman in the world, the Countess de Vaurigard, says about you."

This did not seem very closely to echo Madame de Vaurigard's habit of phrasing, but Mellin perceived that it might be only the fat man's way of putting things.

"You ain't goin' back on *her*, are you?" continued Mr. Pedlow. "You ain't goin' to make her out a

liar? I tell you, when the Countess de Vaurigard says a man's game, he *is* game!" He laid his big paw cordially on Mellin's shoulder and smiled, lowering his voice to a friendly whisper. "And I 'll bet ten thousand dollars right out of my pants pocket you *are* game, too!"

He pressed a glass into the other's hand. Smiling feebly, the embarrassed Mellin accepted it.

"Make it four more, Tommy," said Pedlow. "And here," continued this thoughtful man, "I don't go bandying no ladies' names around a bar-room—that ain't my style—but I do want to propose a toast. I won't name her, but you all know who I mean."

"Sure we do," interjected Cooley warmly. "Queen! That 's what she is."

"Here 's *to* her," continued Mr. Pedlow. "Here 's to her—brightest and best—and no heel-taps! And now let 's set down over in the corner and take it easy. It ain't hardly five o'clock yet, and we can set here comfortable, gittin' ready for dinner, until half-past six, anyway."

Whereupon the four seated themselves about a tabouret in the corner, and a waiter immediately bringing them four fresh glasses from the bar, Mellin

began to understand what Mr. Pedlow meant by "gittin' ready for dinner." The burden of the conversation was carried almost entirely by the Honorable Chandler, though Cooley, whose boyish face was deeply flushed, now and then managed to interrupt by talking louder than the fat man. Mr. Sneyd sat silent.

"Good ole Sneyd," said Pedlow. "*He* never talks, jest saws wood. Only Britisher I ever liked. Plays cards like a goat."

"He played a mighty good game on the steamer," said Cooley warmly.

"I don't care what he did on the steamer, he played like a goat the only time *I* ever played with him. You know he did. I reckon you was *there!*"

"Should say I *was* there! He played mighty well—"

"Like a goat," reiterated the fat man firmly.

"Nothing of the sort. You had a run of hands, that was all. Nobody can go against the kind of luck you had that night; and you took it away from Sneyd and me in rolls. But we 'll land you pretty soon, won't we, ole Sneydie?"

"We sh'll have a shawt at him, at least," said the Englishman.

"Perhaps he won't want us to try," young Cooley pursued derisively. "Perhaps he thinks *I* play like a goat, too!"

Mr. Pedlow threw back his head and roared. "Give me somep'n easy! You don't know no more how to play a hand of cards than a giraffe does. I 'll throw in all of my Blue Gulch gold-stock—and it 's worth eight hundred thousand dollars if it 's worth a cent—I 'll put it up against that tin automobile of yours, divide chips even and play you freeze-out for it. You play cards? Go learn hop-scotch!"

"You wait!" exclaimed the other indignantly. "Next time we play we 'll make you look so small you 'll think you 're back in Congress!"

At this Mr. Pedlow again threw back his head and roared, his vast body so shaken with mirth that the glass he held in his hand dropped to the floor.

"There," said Cooley, "that 's the second Martini you 've spilled. You 're two behind the rest of us."

"What of it?" bellowed the fat man. "There 's plenty comin', ain't there? Four more, Tommy, and bring cigars. Don't take a cent from none of these Indians. Gentlemen, your money ain't good here. I own this bar, and this is my night."

Mellin had begun to feel at ease, and after a time—

as they continued to sit—he realized that his repugnance to Mr. Pedlow was wearing off; he felt that there must be good in any one whom Madame de Vaurigard liked. She had spoken of Pedlow often on their drives; he was an "eccentric," she said, an "original." Why not accept her verdict? Besides, Pedlow was a man of distinction and force; he had been in Congress; he was a millionaire; and, as became evident in the course of a long recital of the principal events of his career, most of the great men of the time were his friends and protégés.

" 'Well, Mack,' says I one day when we were in the House together"—(thus Mr. Pedlow, alluding to the late President McKinley)—" 'Mack,' says I, 'if you 'd drop that double standard business'—he was waverin' toward silver along then—'I don't know but I might git the boys to nominate you fer President.' 'I 'll think it over,' he says—'I 'll think it over.' You remember me tellin' you about that at the time, don't you, Sneyd, when you was in the British Legation at Washin'ton?"

"Pahfictly," said Mr. Sneyd, lighting a cigar with great calmness.

" 'Yes,' I says, 'Mack,' I says, 'if you 'll drop it, I 'll turn in and git you the nomination.' "

"Did he drop it?" asked Mellin innocently.

Mr. Pedlow leaned forward and struck the young man's knee a resounding blow with the palm of his hand.

"He was *nominated*, was n't he?"

"Time to dress," announced Mr. Sneyd, looking at his watch.

"One more round first," insisted Cooley, with prompt vehemence. "Let 's finish with our first toast again. Can't drink that too often."

This proposition was received with warmest approval, and they drank standing.

"Brightest and best!" shouted Mr. Pedlow.

"Queen! What she is!" exclaimed Cooley.

"*Ma belle Marquise!*" whispered Mellin tenderly, as the rim touched his lips.

A small, keen-faced man, whose steady gray eyes were shielded by tortoise-rimmed spectacles, had come into the room and now stood quietly at the bar, sipping a glass of Vichy. He was sharply observant of the party as it broke up, Pedlow and Sneyd preceding the younger men to the corridor, and, as the latter turned to follow, the stranger stepped quickly forward, speaking Cooley's name.

"What 's the matter?"

"Perhaps you don't remember me. My name s Cornish. I 'm a newspaper man, a correspondent." (He named a New York paper.) "I 'm down here to get a Vatican story. I knew your father for a number of years before his death, and I think I may claim that he was a friend of mine."

"That 's good," said the youth cordially. "If I had n't a fine start already, and was n't in a hurry to dress, we 'd have another."

"You were pointed out to me in Paris," continued Cornish. "I found where you were staying and called on you the next day, but you had just started for the Riviera." He hesitated, glancing at Mellin. "Can you give me half a dozen words with you in private?"

"You 'll have to excuse me, I 'm afraid. I 've only got about ten minutes to dress. See you to-morrow."

"I should like it to be as soon as possible," the journalist said seriously. "It isn 't on my own account, and I——"

"All right. You come to my room at ten t'morrow morning?"

"Well, if you can't possibly make it to-night," said Cornish reluctantly. "I wish——"

"Can't possibly."

And Cooley, taking Mellin by the arm, walked rapidly down the corridor. "Funny ole correspondent," he murmured. "What do *I* know about the Vatican?"

CHAPTER V

LADY MOUNT-RHYSWICKE

THE four friends of Madame de Vaurigard were borne to her apartment from the Magnifique in Cooley's big car. They sailed triumphantly down and up the hills in a cool and bracing air, under a moon that shone as brightly for them as it had for Cæsar, and Mellin's soul was buoyant within him. He thought of Cranston and laughed aloud. What would Cranston say if it could see him in a sixty-horse touring-car, with two millionaires and an English diplomat, brother of an earl, and all on the way to dine with a countess? If Mary Kramer could see him! . . . Poor Mary Kramer! Poor little Mary Kramer!

A man-servant took their coats in Madame de Vaurigard's hall, where they could hear through the curtains the sound of one or two voices in cheerful conversation.

Sneyd held up his hand.

"Listen," he said. "Shawly, that is n't Lady Mount-Rhyswicke's voice! She could n't be in

Reom—always a Rhyswicke Caws'l for Decembah. By Jev, it is!"

"Nothin' of the kind," said Pedlow. "I know Lady Mount-Rhyswicke as well as I know you. I started her father in business. When he was clerkin' behind a counter in Liverpool I give him the money to begin on. 'Make good,' says I, 'that 's all. Make good!' And he done it, too. Educated his daughter fit fer a princess, married her to Mount-Rhyswicke, and when he died left her ten million dollars if he left her a cent! I know Madge Mount-Rhyswicke and that ain't her voice."

A peal of silvery laughter rang from the other side of the curtain.

"They 've heard you," said Cooley.

"An' who could help it?" Madame de Vaurigard herself threw back the curtains. "Who could help hear our great, dear, ole lion? How he roar'!"

She wore a white velvet "princesse" gown of a fashion which was a shade less than what is called "daring," with a rope of pearls falling from her neck and a diamond star in her dark hair. Standing with one arm uplifted to the curtains, and with the mellow glow of candles and firelight behind her, she was so lovely that both Mellin and Cooley stood

breathlessly still until she changed her attitude. This she did only to move toward them, extending a hand to each, letting Cooley seize the right and Mellin the left.

Each of them was pleased with what he got, particularly Mellin. "The left is nearer the heart," he thought.

She led them through the curtains, not withdrawing her hands until they entered the salon. She might have led them out of her fifth-story window in that fashion, had she chosen.

"My two wicked boys!" she laughed tenderly.

This also pleased both of them, though each would have preferred to be her only wicked boy—a preference which, perhaps, had something to do with the latter events of the evening.

"Aha! I know you both; before twenty minute' you will be makin' love to Lady Mount-Rhyswicke. Behol' those two already! An' they are only ole frien's."

She pointed to Pedlow and Sneyd. The fat man was shouting at a woman in pink satin, who lounged, half-reclining, among a pile of cushions upon a divan near the fire; Sneyd gallantly bending over her to kiss her hand.

"It is a very little dinner, you see," continued the hostess, "only seven, but we shall be seven time' happier."

The seventh person proved to be the Italian, Corni, who had surrendered his seat in Madame de Vaurigard's victoria to Mellin on the Pincio. He presently made his appearance followed by a waiter bearing a tray of glasses filled with a pink liquid, while the Countess led her two wicked boys across the room to present them to Lady Mount-Rhyswicke. Already Mellin was forming sentences for his next letter to the Cranston Telegraph: "Lady Mount-Rhyswicke said to me the other evening, while discussing the foreign policy of Great Britain, in Comtesse de Vaurigard's salon . . ." "An English peeress of pronounced literary acumen has been giving me rather confidentially her opinion of our American poets . . ."

The inspiration of these promising fragments was a large, weary-looking person, with no lack of powdered shoulder above her pink bodice and a profusion of "undulated" hair of so decided a blond that it might have been suspected that the decision had lain with the lady herself.

"Howjdo," she said languidly, when Mellin's

name was pronounced to her. "There 's a man behind you tryin' to give you something to drink."

"Who was it said these were Martinis?" snorted Pedlow. "They 've got perfumery in 'em."

"Ah, what a bad lion it is!" Madame de Vaurigard lifted both hands in mock horror. "Roar, lion, roar!" she cried. "An' think of the emotion of our good Cavaliere Corni, who have come an hour early jus' to make them for us! I ask Monsieur Mellin if it is not good."

"And I 'll leave it to Cooley," said Pedlow. "If he can drink all of his I 'll eat crow!"

Thus challenged, the two young men smilingly accepted glasses from the waiter, and lifted them on high.

"Same toast," said Cooley. "Queen!"

"*A la belle Marquise!*"

Gallantly they drained the glasses at a gulp, and Madame de Vaurigard clapped her hands.

"Bravo!" she cried. "You see? Corni and I, we win."

"Look at their faces!" said Mr. Pedlow, tactlessly drawing attention to what was, for the moment, an undeniably painful sight. "Don't tell *me* an Italian knows how to make a good Martini!"

Mellin profoundly agreed, but, as he joined the

small procession to the Countess' dinner-table, he was certain that an Italian at least knew how to make a strong one.

The light in the dining-room was provided by six heavily-shaded candles on the table; the latter decorated with delicate lines of orchids. The chairs were large and comfortable, covered with tapestry; the glass was old Venetian, and the servants, moving like useful ghosts in the shadow outside the circle of mellow light, were particularly efficient in the matter of keeping the wine-glasses full. Madame de Vaurigard had put Pedlow on her right, Cooley on her left, with Mellin directly opposite her, next to Lady Mount-Rhyswicke. Mellin was pleased, because he thought he would have the Countess's face toward him. Anything would have pleased him just then.

"This is the kind of table *everybody* ought to have," he observed to the party in general, as he finished his first glass of champagne. "I 'm going to have it like this at my place in the States—if I ever decide to go back. I 'll have six separate candlesticks like this, not a candelabrum, and that will be the only light in the room. And I 'll never have anything but orchids on my table——"

"For my part," Lady Mount-Rhyswicke interrupted in the loud, tired monotone which seemed to be her only manner of speaking, "I like more light. I like all the light that 's goin'."

"If Lady Mount-Rhyswicke sat at *my* table," returned Mellin dashingly, "I should wish all the light in the world to shine upon so happy an event."

"Hear the man!" she drawled. "He 's proposin' to me. Thinks I 'm a widow."

There was a chorus of laughter, over which rose the bellow of Mr. Pedlow.

" 'He 's game!' she says—and *ain't* he?"

Across the table Madame de Vaurigard's eyes met Mellin's with a mocking intelligence so complete that he caught her message without need of the words she noiselessly formed with her lips: "I tol' you you would be makin' love to her!"

He laughed joyously in answer. Why should n't he flirt with Lady Mount-Rhyswicke? He was thoroughly happy; his Héléne, his *belle Marquise*, sat across the table from him sending messages to him with her eyes. He adored her, but he liked Lady Mount-Rhyswicke—he liked everybody and everything in the world. He liked Pedlow particularly, and it no longer troubled him that the fat

man should be a friend of Madame de Vaurigard. Pedlow was a "character" and a wit as well. Mellin laughed heartily at everything the Honorable Chandler Pedlow said.

"This is life," remarked the young man to his fair neighbor.

"What is? Sittin' round a table, eatin' and drinkin'?"

"Ah, lovely skeptic!" She looked at him strangely, but he continued with growing enthusiasm: "I mean to sit at such a table as this, with such a *chef*, with such wines—to know one crowded hour like this is to live! Not a thing is missing; all this swagger furniture, the rich atmosphere of smartness about the whole place; best of all, the company. It 's a great thing to have the *real* people around you, the right sort, you know, socially; people you 'd ask to your own table at home. There are only seven, but every one *distingué*, every one——"

She leaned both elbows on the table with her hands palm to palm, and, resting her cheek against the back of her left hand, looked at him steadily.

"And you—are you distinguished, too?"

"Oh, I would n't be much known over *here*," he said modestly.

"Do you write poetry?"

"Oh, not professionally, though it is published. I suppose"—he sipped his champagne with his head a little to one side as though judging its quality—"I suppose I 've been more or less a dilettante. I 've knocked about the world a good bit."

"Héléne says you 're one of these leisure American billionaires like Mr. Cooley there," she said in her tired voice.

"Oh, none of us are really quite billionaires." He laughed deprecatingly.

"No, I suppose not—not really. Go on and tell me some more about life and this distinguished company."

"Hey, folks!" Mr. Pedlow's roar broke in upon this dialogue. "You two are gittin' mighty thick over there. We 're drinking a toast, and you 'll have to break away long enough to join in."

"Queen! That 's what she is!" shouted Cooley.

Mellin lifted his glass with the others and drank to Madame de Vaurigard, but the woman at his side did not change her attitude and continued to sit with her elbows on the table, her cheek on the back of her hand, watching him thoughtfully.

CHAPTER VI

RAKE'S PROGRESS

MANY toasts were uproariously honored, the health of each member of the party in turn, then the country of each: France and England first, out of courtesy to the ladies, Italy next, since this beautiful and extraordinary meeting of distinguished people (as Mellin remarked in a short speech he felt called upon to make) took place in that wonderful land, then the United States. This last toast the gentlemen felt it necessary to honor by standing in their chairs. [*Song: The Star-spangled Banner—without words—by Mr. Cooley and chorus.*]

When the cigars were brought, the ladies graciously remained, adding tiny spirals of smoke from their cigarettes to the layers of blue haze which soon overhung the table. Through this haze, in the gentle light (which seemed to grow softer and softer) Mellin saw the face of Héléne de Vaurigard, luminous as an angel's. She *was* an angel—and the others

were gods. What could be more appropriate in Rome? Lady Mount-Rhyswicke was Juno, but more beautiful. For himself, he felt like a god too, Olympic in serenity.

He longed for mysterious dangers. How debonair he would stroll among them! He wished to explore the unknown; felt the need of a splendid adventure, and had a happy premonition that one was coming nearer and nearer. He favored himself with a hopeful vision of the apartment on fire, Robert Russ Mellin smiling negligently among the flames and Madame de Vaurigard kneeling before him in adoration. Immersed in delight, he puffed his cigar and let his eyes rest dreamily upon the face of Héléne. He was quite undisturbed by an argument, more a commotion than a debate, between Mr. Pedlow and young Cooley. It ended by their rising, the latter overturning a chair in his haste.

"I don't know the rudiments, don't I?" cried the boy. "You wait! Ole Sneydie and I 'll trim you down! Corni says he 'll play, too. Come on, Mellin."

"I won't go unless Héléne goes," said Mellin. "What are you going to do when you get there?"

"Alas, my frien'!" exclaimed Madame de Vauri-

gard, rising, "is it not what I tol' you? Always you are never content wizout your play. You come to dinner an' when it is finish' you play, play, play!"

"*Play?*" He sprang to his feet. "Bravo! That 's the very thing I 've been wanting to do. I knew there was something I wanted to do, but I could n't think what it was."

Lady Mount-Rhyswicke followed the others into the salon, but Madame de Vaurigard waited just inside the doorway for Mellin.

"*High* play!" he cried. "We must play high! I won't play any other way.—I want to play *high!*"

"Ah, wicked one! What did I tell you?"

He caught her hand. "And you must play too, Héléne."

"No, no," she laughed breathlessly.

"Then you 'll watch. Promise you 'll watch me. I won't let you go till you promise to watch me."

"I shall adore it, my frien'!"

"Mellin," called Cooley from the other room. "You comin' or not?"

"Can't you see me?" answered Mellin hilariously, entering with Madame de Vaurigard, who was rosy with laughter. "Peculiar thing to look at a man and not see him."

Candles were lit in many sconces on the walls, and the card-table had been pushed to the centre of the room, little towers of blue, white and scarlet counters arranged upon it in orderly rows like miniature castles.

"Now, then," demanded Cooley, "are the ladies goin' to play?"

"Never!" cried Madame de Vaurigard.

"All right," said the youth cheerfully; "you can look on. Come and sit by me for a mascot."

"You 'll need a mascot, my boy!" shouted Pedlow. "That 's right, though; take her."

He pushed a chair close to that in which Cooley had already seated himself, and Madame de Vaurigard dropped into it, laughing. "Mellin, you set there," he continued, pushing the young man into a seat opposite Cooley. "We 'll give both you young fellers a mascot." He turned to Lady Mount-Rhyswicke, who had gone to the settee by the fire. "Madge, you come and set by Mellin," he commanded jovially. "Maybe he 'll forget you ain't a widow again."

"I don't believe I care much about bein' anybody's mascot to-night," she answered. There was a hint of anger in her tired monotone.

"What?" He turned from the table and walked over to the fireplace. "I reckon I did n't understand you," he said quietly, almost gently. "You better come, had n't you?"

She met his inscrutable little eyes steadily. A faint redness slowly revealed itself on her powdered cheeks; then she followed him back to the table and took the place he had assigned to her at Mellin's elbow.

"I 'll bank," said Pedlow, taking a chair between Cooley and the Italian, "unless somebody wants to take it off my hands. Now, what are we playing?"

"Pokah," responded Sneyd with mild sarcasm.

"Bravo!" cried Mellin. "That 's *my* game. Ber-*ravo!*"

This was so far true; it was the only game upon which he had ever ventured money; he had played several times when the wagers were allowed to reach a limit of twenty-five cents.

"You know what I mean, I reckon," said Pedlow. "I mean what we are playin' *fer?*"

"Twenty-five franc limit," responded Cooley authoritatively. "Double for jacks. Play two hours and settle when we quit."

Mellin leaned back in his chair. "You call that high?" he asked, with a sniff of contempt. "Why not double it?"

The fat man hammered the table with his fist delightedly. "'He 's game,' she says. 'He 's the gamest little Indian ever come down the big road!' she says. Was she right? What? Maybe she was n't! We 'll double it before very long, my boy; this 'll do to start on. There." He distributed some of the small towers of ivory counters and made a memorandum in a notebook. "There 's four hundred apiece."

"That all?" inquired Mellin, whereupon Mr. Pedlow uproariously repeated Madame de Vaurigard's alleged tribute.

As the game began, the intelligent-looking maid appeared from the dining-room, bearing bottles of whiskey and soda, and these she deposited upon small tables at the convenience of the players, so that at the conclusion of the first encounter in the gentle tournament there was material for a toast to the gallant who had won it.

"Here 's to the gamest Indian of us all," proposed the fat man. "Did you notice him call me with a pair of tens? And me queen-high!"

Mellin drained a deep glass in honor of himself. "On my soul, Chan' Pedlow, I think you 're the bes' fellow in the whole world," he said gratefully. "Only trouble with you—you don't want to play high enough."

He won again and again, adding other towers of counters to his original allotment, so that he had the semblance of a tiny castle. When the cards had been dealt for the fifth time he felt the light contact of a slipper touching his foot under the table.

That slipper, he decided (from the nature of things) could belong to none other than his Héléne, and even as he came to this conclusion the slight pressure against his foot was gently but distinctly increased thrice. He pressed the slipper in return with his shoe, at the same time giving Madame dr Vaurigard a look of grateful surprise and tenderness, which threw her into a confusion so evidently genuine that for an unworthy moment he had a jealous suspicion she had meant the little caress for some other.

It was a disagreeable thought, and, in the hope of banishing it, he refilled his glass; but his mood had begun to change. It seemed to him that Héléne

was watching Cooley a great deal too devotedly. Why had she consented to sit by Cooley, when she had promised to watch Robert Russ Mellin? He observed the pair stealthily.

Cooley consulted her in laughing whispers upon every discard, upon every bet. Now and then, in their whisperings, Cooley's hair touched hers; sometimes she laid her hand on his the more conveniently to look at his cards. Mellin began to be enraged. Did she think that puling milksop had as much as a shadow of the daring, the devilry, the carelessness of consequences which lay within Robert Russ Mellin? "Consequences?" What were they? There were no such things! She would not look at him—well, he would make her! Thenceforward he raised every bet by another to the extent of the limit agreed upon.

Mr. Cooley was thoroughly happy. He did not resemble Ulysses; he would never have had himself bound to the mast; and there were already sounds of unearthly sweetness in his ears. His conferences with his lovely hostess easily consoled him for his losses. In addition, he was triumphing over the boaster, for Mr. Pedlow, with a very ill grace and swearing (not under his breath), was losing too

The Countess, reiterating for the hundredth time that Cooley was a "wicked one," sweetly constituted herself his cup-bearer; kept his glass full and brought him fresh cigars.

Mellin dealt her furious glances, and filled his own glass, for Lady Mount-Rhyswicke plainly had no conception of herself in the rôle of a Hebe. The hospitable Pedlow, observing this neglect, was moved to chide her.

"Look at them two cooing doves over there," he said reproachfully, a jerk of his bulbous thumb indicating Madame de Vaurigard and her young protégé. "Madge, can't you do nothin' fer our friend the Indian? Can't you even help him to sody?"

"Oh, perhaps," she answered with the slightest flash from her tired eyes. Then she nonchalantly lifted Mellin's replenished glass from the table and drained it. This amused Cooley.

"I like that!" he chuckled. "That 's *one* way of helpin' a feller! Héléne, can you do any better than that?"

"Ah, this dear, droll Cooley!"

The tantalizing witch lifted the youth's glass to his lips and let him drink, as a mother

helps a thirsty child. "*Bébé!*" she laughed endearingly.

As the lovely Héléne pronounced that word, Lady Mount-Rhyswicke was leaning forward to replace Mellin's empty glass upon the table.

"I don't care whether you 're a widow or not!" he shouted furiously. And he resoundingly kissed her massive shoulder.

There was a wild shout of laughter; even the imperturbable Sneyd (who had continued to win steadily) wiped tears from his eyes, and Madame de Vaurigard gave way to intermittent hysteria throughout the ensuing half-hour.

For a time Mellin sat grimly observing this inexplicable merriment with a cold smile.

"Laugh on!" he commanded with bitter satire, some ten minutes after play had been resumed—and was instantly obeyed.

Whereupon his mood underwent another change, and he became convinced that the world was a warm and kindly place, where it was good to live. He forgot that he was jealous of Cooley and angry with the Countess; he liked everybody again, especially Lady Mount-Rhyswicke. "Won't you sit farther forward?" he begged her

earnestly; "so that I can see your beautiful golden hair?"

He heard but dimly the spasmodic uproar that followed. "Laugh on!" he repeated with a swoop of his arm. "I don't care! Don't you care either, Mrs. Mount-Rhyswicke. Please sit where I can see your beautiful golden hair. Don't be afraid I 'll kiss you again. I would n't do it for the whole world. You 're one of the noblest women I ever knew. I feel that 's true. I don't know how I know it, but I know it. Let 'em laugh!"

After this everything grew more and more hazy to him. For a time there was, in the centre of the haze, a nimbus of light which revealed his cards to him and the towers of chips which he constantly called for and which as constantly disappeared—like the towers of a castle in Spain. Then the haze thickened, and the one thing clear to him was a phrase from an old-time novel he had read long ago:

"Debt of honor."

The three words appeared to be written in flames against a background of dense fog. A debt of honor was a promissory note which had to be paid on Monday, and the appeal to the obdurate grandfather—a peer of England, the Earl of Mount-

Rhyswicke, in fact—was made at midnight, Sunday. The fog grew still denser, lifted for a moment while he wrote his name many times on slips of blue paper; closed down once more, and again lifted—out-of-doors this time—to show him a lunatic ballet of moons dancing streakily upon the horizon.

He heard himself say quite clearly, "All right, old man, thank you; but don't bother about me," to a pallid but humorous Cooley in evening clothes; the fog thickened; oblivion closed upon him for a seeming second. . . .

CHAPTER VII

THE NEXT MORNING

SUDDENLY he sat up in bed in his room at the Magnifique, gazing upon a disconsolate Cooley in gray tweeds who sat heaped in a chair at the foot of the bed with his head in his hands.

Mellin's first sensation was of utter mystification; his second was more corporeal: the consciousness of physical misery, of consuming fever, of aches that ran over his whole body, converging to a dreadful climax in his head, of a throat so immoderately parched it seemed to crackle, and of a thirst so avid it was a passion. His eye fell upon a carafe of water on a chair at his bedside; he seized upon it with a shaking hand and drank half its contents before he set it down. The action attracted his companion's attention and he looked up, showing a pale and haggard countenance.

"How do you feel?" inquired Cooley with a wan smile.

Mellin's head dropped back upon the pillow and he made one or two painful efforts to speak before he succeeded in finding a ghastly semblance of his voice.

"I thought I was at Madame de Vaurigard's."

"You were," said the other, adding grimly: "We both were."

"But that was only a minute ago."

"It was six hours ago. It 's goin' on ten o'clock in the morning."

"I don't understand how that can be. How did I get here?"

"I brought you. I was pretty bad, but you—— I never saw anything like you! From the time you kissed Lady Mount-Rhyswicke——"

Mellin sat bolt upright in bed, staring wildly. He began to tremble violently.

"Don't you remember that?" asked Cooley.

Suddenly he did. The memory of it came with inexorable clarity; he crossed forearms over his horror-stricken face and fell back upon the pillow.

"Oh," he gasped. "Un-speakable! Un-speakable!"

"Lord! Don't worry about that! I don't think she minded."

"It 's the thought of Madame de Vaurigard—it kills me! The horror of it—that I should do such a thing in her house! She 'll never speak to me again, she ought n't to; she ought to send her groom to beat me! You can't think what I 've lost——"

"Can't I?" Mr. Cooley rose from his chair and began to pace up and down the chamber. "I can guess to within a thousand francs of what *I 've* lost! I had to get the hotel to cash a check on New York for me this morning. I 've a habit of carrying all my money in bills, and a fool trick, too. Well, I 'm cured of it!"

"Oh, if it were only a little *money* and nothing else that I 'd lost! The money means nothing." Mellin choked.

"I suppose you 're pretty well fixed. Well, so am I," Cooley shook his head, "but money certainly means something to me!"

"It would n't if you 'd thrown away the most precious friendship of your life."

"See here," said Cooley, halting at the foot of the bed and looking at his stricken companion from beneath frowning brows, "I guess I can see how it is with you, and I 'll tell you frankly it 's been the same with me. I never met such a fas-

cinatin' woman in my life: she throws a reg'ler ole-fashioned *spell* over you! Now I hate to say it, but I can't help it, because it plain hits me in the face every time I think of it; the truth is —well, sir, I 'm afraid you and me have had little red soldier-coats and caps put on us and strings tied to our belts while we turned somersets for the children."

"I don't understand. I don't know what you 're talking about."

"No? It seems to get more and more simple to me. I 've been thinking it all over and over again. I can't *help* it! See here: I met Sneyd on the steamer, without any introduction. He sort of warmed into the game in the smoking-room, and he won straight along the trip. He called on me in London and took me to meet the Countess at her hotel. We three went to the theatre and lunch and so forth a few times; and when I left for Paris she turned up on the way: that 's when you met her. Couple of days later, Sneyd came over, and he and the Countess introduced me to dear ole friend Pedlow. So you see, I don't rightly even know who any of 'em really *are:* just took 'em for granted, as it were. We had lots

of fun, I admit that, honkin' about in my car. We only played cards once, and that was in her apartment the last night before I left Paris, but that one time Pedlow won fifteen thousand francs from me. When I told them my plans, how I was goin' to motor down to Rome, she said *she* would be in Rome—and, I tell you, I was happy as a poodle-pup about it. Sneyd said he might be in Rome along about then, and open-hearted ole Pedlow said not to be surprised if *he* turned up, too. Well, he did, almost to the minute, and in the meantime she 'd got *you* hooked on, fine and tight."

"I don't understand you," Mellin lifted himself painfully on an elbow. "I don't know what you 're getting at, but it seems to me that you 're speaking disrespectfully of an angel that I 've insulted, and I——"

"Now see here, Mellin, I 'll tell you something." The boy's white face showed sudden color and there was a catch in his voice. "I was—I 've been mighty near in *love* with that woman! But I've had a kind of a shock; I 've got my common-sense back, and I 'm *not*, any more. I don't know exactly how much money I had, but it was between thirty-

five and thirty-eight thousand francs, and Sneyd won it all after we took off the limit—over seven thousand dollars—at her table last night. Putting two and two together, honestly it looks bad. It looks *mighty* bad! Now, I 'm pretty well fixed, and yesterday I did n't care whether school kept or not, but seven thousand dollars is real money to anybody! My old man worked pretty hard for his first seven thousand, I guess, and"—he gulped—"he 'd think a lot of me for lettin' go of it the way I did last night, *would n't* he? You never *see* things like this till the next morning! And you remember that other woman sat where she could see every hand *you* drew, and the Countess——"

"Stop!" Mellin flung one arm up violently, striking the bedboard with his knuckles. "I won't hear a syllable against Madame de Vaurigard!"

Young Cooley regarded him steadily for a moment. "Have you remembered yet," he said slowly, "how much *you* lost last night?"

"I only remember that I behaved like an unspeakable boor in the presence of the divinest creature that ever——"

Cooley disregarded the outburst, and said:

"When we settled, you had a pad of express company checks worth six hundred dollars. You signed all of 'em and turned 'em over to Sneyd with three one-hundred-lire bills, which was all the cash you had with you. Then you gave him your note for twelve thousand francs to be paid within three days. You made a great deal of fuss about its being a 'debt of honor.'" He paused. "You had n't remembered that, had you?"

Mellin had closed his eyes. He lay quite still and made no answer.

"No, I 'll bet you had n't," said Cooley, correctly deducing the fact. "You 're well off, or you would n't be at this hotel, and, for all I know, you may be fixed so you won't mind your loss as much as I do mine; but it ought to make you kind of charitable toward my suspicions of Madame de Vaurigard's friends."

The six hundred dollars in express company checks and the three hundred-lire bills were all the money the unhappy Mellin had in the world, and until he could return to Cranston and go back to work in the real-estate office again, he had no prospect of any more. He had not even his steamer

ticket. In the shock of horror and despair he whispered brokenly:

"I don't care if they 're the worst people in the world, they 're better than I am!"

The other's gloom cleared a little at this. "Well, you *have* got it!" he exclaimed briskly. "You don't know how different you 'll feel after a long walk in the open air." He looked at his watch. "I 've got to go and see what that newspaper-man, Cornish, wants; it 's ten o'clock. I 'll be back after a while; I want to reason this out with you. I don't deny but it 's possible I 'm wrong; anyway, you think it over while I 'm gone. You take a good hard think, will you?"

As he closed the door, Mellin slowly drew the coverlet over his head. It was as if he covered the face of some one who had just died.

CHAPTER VIII

WHAT CORNISH KNEW

TWO hours passed before young Cooley returned. He knocked twice without a reply; then he came in.

The coverlet was still over Mellin's head.

"Asleep?" asked Cooley.

"No."

The coverlet was removed by a shaking hand.

"Murder!" exclaimed Cooley sympathetically, at sight of the other's face. "A night off certainly does things to you! Better let me get you some——"

"No. I 'll be all right—after while."

"Then I 'll go ahead with our little troubles. I 've decided to leave for Paris by the one-thirty and have n't got a whole lot of time. Cornish is here with me in the hall: he 's got something to say that 's important for you to hear, and I 'm goin' to bring him right in." He waved his hand toward the door, which he had left open. "Come along, Cornish. Poor ole Mellin 'll play Du Barry

with us and give us a morning leevy while he listens in a bed with a palanquin to it. Now let 's draw up chairs and be sociable."

The journalist came in, smoking a long cigar, and took the chair the youth pushed toward him; but, after a twinkling glance through his big spectacles at the face on the pillow, he rose and threw the cigar out of the window.

"Go ahead," said Cooley. "I want you to tell him just what you told me, and when you 're through I want to see if he does n't think I 'm Sherlock Holmes' little brother."

"If Mr. Mellin does not feel too ill," said Cornish dryly; "I know how painful such cases sometimes——"

"No." Mellin moistened his parched lips and made a pitiful effort to smile. "I 'll be all right very soon."

"I am very sorry," began the journalist, "that I was n't able to get a few words with Mr. Cooley yesterday evening. Perhaps you noticed that I tried as hard as I could, without using actual force"—he laughed—"to detain him."

"You did your best," agreed Cooley ruefully,

"and I did my worst. Nobody ever listens till the next day!"

"Well, I 'm glad no vital damage was done, anyway," said Cornish. "It would have been pretty hard lines if you two young fellows had been *poor* men, but as it is you 're probably none the worse for a lesson like this."

"You seem to think seven thousand dollars is a joke," remarked Cooley.

Cornish laughed again. "You see, it flatters me to think my time was so valuable that a ten minutes' talk with me would have saved so much money."

"I doubt it," said Cooley. "Ten to one we 'd neither of us have believed you—last night!"

"I doubt it, too." Cornish turned to Mellin. "I hear that you, Mr. Mellin, are still of the opinion that you were dealing with straight people?"

Mellin managed to whisper "Yes."

"Then," said Cornish, "I 'd better tell you just what I know about it, and you can form your own opinion as to whether I *do* know or not. I have been in the newspaper business on this side for fifteen years, and my headquarters are in Paris, where these people are very well known. The

man who calls himself 'Chandler Pedlow' was a faro-dealer for Tom Stout in Chicago when Stout's place was broken up, a good many years ago. There was a real Chandler Pedlow in Congress from a California district in the early nineties, but he is dead. This man's name is Ben Welch: he 's a professional swindler; and the Englishman, Sneyd, is another; a quiet man, not so well known as Welch, and not nearly so clever, but a good 'feeder' for him. The very attractive Frenchwoman who calls herself 'Countess de Vaurigard' is generally believed to be Sneyd's wife, though I could not take the stand on that myself. Welch is the brains of the organization: you might n't think it, but he 's a very brilliant man—he might have made a great reputation in business if he 'd been straight —and, with this woman's help, he 's carried out some really astonishing schemes. His manner is clumsy; *he* knows that, bless you, but it 's the only manner he can manage, and she is so adroit she can sugar-coat even such a pill as that and coax people to swallow it. I don't know anything about the Italian who is working with them down here. But a gang of the Welch-Vaurigard-Sneyd type has tentacles all over the Continent; such people

are in touch with sharpers everywhere, you see."

"Yes," Cooley interpolated, "and with woolly little lambkins, too."

"Well," chuckled Cornish, "that 's the way they make their living, you know."

"Go on and tell him the rest of it," urged Cooley.

"About Lady Mount-Rhyswicke," said Cornish, "it seems strange enough, but she had a perfect right to her name. She is a good deal older than she looks, and I've heard she used to be remarkably beautiful. Her third husband was Lord George Mount-Rhyswicke, a man who 'd been dropped from his clubs, and he deserted her in 1903, but she had not divorced him. It is said that he is somewhere in South America; however, as to that I do not know."

Mr. Cornish put the very slightest possible emphasis on the word "know," and proceeded:

"I 've heard that she is sincerely attached to him and sends him money from time to time, when she has it—though that, too, is third-hand information. She has been *declasse* ever since her first divorce. That was a 'celebrated case,' and she 's dropped down pretty far in the world, though

I judge she 's a good deal the best of this crowd. Exactly what her relations to the others are I don't know, but I imagine that she 's pretty thick with 'em."

"Just a little!" exclaimed Cooley. "She sits behind one of the lambkins and Héléne behind the other while they get their woolly wool clipped. I suppose the two of 'em signaled what was in every hand we held, though I 'm sure they need n't have gone to the trouble! Fact is, I don't see why they bothered about goin' through the form of playin' cards with us at all. They could have taken it away without that! Whee!" Mr. Cooley whistled loud and long. "And there 's loads of wise young men on the ocean now, hurryin' over to take our places in the pens. Well, they can have *mine!* Funny, Mellin: nobody would come up to you or me in the Grand Central in New York and try to sell us greenbacks just as good as real. But we come over to Europe with our pockets full o' money and start in to see the Big City with Jesse James in a false mustache on one arm, and Lucresha Borgy, under an assumed name, on the other!"

"I am afraid I agree with you," said Cornish;

"though I must say that, from all I hear, Madame de Vaurigard might put an atmosphere about a thing which would deceive almost any one who was n't on his guard. When a Parisienne of her sort is clever at all she 's irresistible."

"I believe you," Cooley sighed deeply.

"Yesterday evening, Mr. Mellin," continued the journalist, "when I saw the son of my old friend in company with Welch and Sneyd, of course I tried to warn him. I 've often seen them in Paris, though I believe they have no knowledge of me. As I 've said, they are notorious, especially Welch, yet they have managed, so far, to avoid any difficulty with the Paris police, and, I 'm sorry to say, it might be hard to actually prove anything against them. You could n't *prove* that anything was crooked last night, for instance. For that matter, I don't suppose you want to. Mr. Cooley wishes to accept his loss and bear it, and I take it that that will be your attitude, too. In regard to the note you gave Sneyd, I hope you will refuse to pay; I don't think that they would dare press the matter."

"Neither do I," Mr. Cooley agreed. "I left a silver cigarette-case at the apartment last night,

and after talkin' to Cornish a while ago, I sent my man for it with a note to *her* that 'll make 'em all sit up and take some notice. The gang 's all there together, you can be sure. I asked for Sneyd and Pedlow in the office and found they 'd gone out early this morning leavin' word they would n't be back till midnight. And, see here; I know I 'm easy, but somehow I believe you 're even a softer piece o' meat than I am. I want you to promise me that whatever happens you won't pay that I O U."

Mellin moistened his lips in vain. He could not answer.

"I want you to promise me not to pay it," repeated Cooley earnestly.

"I promise," gasped Mellin.

"You won't pay it no matter what they do?"

"No."

This seemed to reassure Mr. Cooley.

"Well," he said, "I 've got to hustle to get my car shipped and make the train. Cornish has finished his job down here and he 's goin' with me. I want to get out. The whole thing 's left a mighty bad taste in my mouth, and I 'd go crazy if I did n't get away from it. Why don't you jump into your clothes and come along, too?"

"I can't."

"Well," said the young man with a sympathetic shake of the head, "you certainly look sick. It may be better if you stay in bed till evening: a train 's a mighty mean place for the day after. But I would n't hang around here too long. If you want money, all you have to do is to ask the hotel to cash a check on your home bank; they 're always glad to do that for Americans." He turned to the door. "Mr. Cornish, if you 're goin' to help me about shippin' the car, I 'm ready."

"So am I. Good-by, Mr. Mellin."

"Good-by," Mellin said feebly—"and thank you."

Young Cooley came back to the bedside and shook the other's feverish hand. "Good-by, ole man. I 'm awful sorry it 's all happened, but I 'm glad it did n't cost you quite as much money as it did me. Otherwise I expect it 's hit us about equally hard. I wish—I wish I could find a *nice one*"—the youth gulped over something not unlike a sob—"as fascinatin' as her!"

Most people have had dreams of approaching dangers in the path of which their bodies remained inert; when, in spite of the frantic wish to fly, it was impossible to move, while all the time the

horror crept closer and closer. This was Mellin's state as he saw the young man going. It was absolutely necessary to ask Cooley for help, to beg him for a loan. But he could not.

He saw Cooley's hand on the doorknob; saw the door swing open.

"Good-by, again," Cooley said; "and good luck to you!"

Mellin's will strove desperately with the shame that held him silent.

The door was closing.

"Oh, Cooley," called Mellin hoarsely.

"Yes. What?"

"J-j-just good-by," said Mellin.

And with that young Cooley was gone.

CHAPTER IX

EXPIATION

A MULTITUDINOUS clangor of bells and a dozen neighboring chimes rang noon; then the rectangular oblongs of hot sunlight that fell from the windows upon the carpet of Mellin's room began imperceptibly to shift their angles and move eastward. From the stone pavement of the street below came the sound of horses pawing and the voices of waiting cabmen; then bells again, and more bells; clamoring the slow and cruel afternoon into the past. But all was silent in Mellin's room, save when, from time to time, a long, shuddering sigh came from the bed.

The unhappy young man had again drawn the coverlet over his head, but not to sleep: it was more like a forlorn and desperate effort to hide, as if he crept into a hole, seeking darkness to cover the shame and fear that racked his soul. For though his shame had been too great to let him confess to young Cooley and ask for help, his fear was as great as his shame; and it increased as the

hours passed. In truth his case was desperate. Except the people who had stripped him, Cooley was the only person in all of Europe with whom he had more than a very casual acquaintance. At home, in Cranston, he had no friends susceptible to such an appeal as it was vitally necessary for him to make. His relatives were not numerous: there were two aunts, the widows of his father's brothers, and a number of old-maid cousins; and he had an uncle in Iowa, a country minister whom he had not seen for years. But he could not cable to any of these for money; nor could he quite conjure his imagination into picturing any of them sending it if he did. And even to cable he would have to pawn his watch, which was an old-fashioned one of silver and might not bring enough to pay the charges.

He began to be haunted by fragmentary, prophetic visions—confused but realistic in detail, and horribly probable—of his ejectment from the hotel, perhaps arrest and trial. He wondered what they did in Italy to people who "beat" hotels; and, remembering what some one had told him of the dreadfulness of Italian jails, convulsive shudderings seized upon him.

The ruddy oblongs of sunlight crawled nearer to the east wall of the room, stretching themselves thinner and thinner, until finally they were not there at all, and the room was left in deepening grayness. Carriages, one after the other, in unintermittent succession, rumbled up to the hotel-entrance beneath the window, bringing goldfish for the aquarium from the music pond on the Pincio and the fountains of Villa Borghese. Wild strains from the Hungarian orchestra, rhapsodical twankings of violins, and the runaway arpeggios of a zither crazed with speed-mania, skipped along the corridors and lightly through Mellin's door. In his mind's eye he saw the gay crowd in the watery light, the little tables where only five days ago he had sat with the loveliest of all the anemone-like ladies. . . .

The beautifully-dressed tea-drinkers were there now, under the green glass dome, prattling and smiling, those people he had called his own. And as the music sounded louder, faster, wilder and wilder with the gipsy madness—then in that darkening bedchamber his soul became articulate in a cry of humiliation:

"God in His mercy forgive me, how raw I was!"

A VISION came before his closed eyes; the maple-bordered street in Cranston, the long, straight, wide street where Mary Kramer lived; a summer twilight; Mary in her white muslin dress on the veranda steps, and a wistaria vine climbing the post beside her, half-embowering her. How cool and sweet and good she looked! How dear—and how *kind!*—she had always been to him.

DUSK stole through the windows: the music ceased and the tea-hour was over. The carriages were departing, bearing the gay people who went away laughing, calling last words to one another, and, naturally, quite unaware that a young man, who, five days before, had adopted them and called them "his own," was lying in a darkened room above them, and crying like a child upon his pillow.

CHAPTER X

THE CAB AT THE CORNER

AT ten o'clock, a page bearing a card upon a silver tray knocked upon the door, and stared with wide-eyed astonishment at the disordered gentleman who opened it.

The card was Lady Mount-Rhyswicke's. Underneath the name was written:

If you are there will you give me a few minutes? I am waiting in a cab at the next corner by the fountain.

Mellin's hand shook as he read. He did not doubt that she came as an emissary; probably they meant to hound him for payment of the note he had given Sneyd, and at that thought he could have shrieked with hysterical laughter.

"Do you speak English?" he asked.

"Spik little. Yes."

"Who gave you this card?"

"Coachman," said the boy. "He wait risposta."

"Tell him to say that I shall be there in five minutes."

"Fi' minute. Yes. Good-by."

Mellin was partly dressed—he had risen half an hour earlier and had been distractedly pacing the floor when the page knocked—and he completed his toilet quickly. He passed down the corridors, descended by the stairway (feeling that to use the elevator would be another abuse of the confidence of the hotel company) and slunk across the lobby with the look and the sensations of a tramp who knows that he will be kicked into the street if anybody catches sight of him.

A closed cab stood near the fountain at the next corner. There was a trunk on the box by the driver, and the roof was piled with bags and rugs. He approached uncertainly.

"Is—is this—is it Lady Mount-Rhyswicke?" he stammered pitifully.

She opened the door.

"Yes. Will you get in? We 'll just drive round the block if you don't mind. I 'll bring you back here in ten minutes." And when he had tremulously complied, "*Avanti, cocchiere,*" she called to the driver, and the tired little cab-horse began to draw them slowly along the deserted street.

Lady Mount-Rhyswicke maintained silence for a

time, while her companion waited, his heart pounding with dreadful apprehension. Finally she gave a short, hard laugh and said:

"I saw your face by the corner light. Been havin' a hard day of it?"

The fear of breaking down kept him from answering. He gulped painfully once or twice, and turned his face away from her. Light enough from a street-lamp shone in for her to see.

"I was rather afraid you 'd refuse," she said seriously. "Really, I wonder you were willin' to come!"

"I was—I was afraid not to." He choked out the confession with the recklessness of final despair.

"So?" she said, with another short laugh. Then she resumed her even, tired monotone: "Your little friend Cooley's note this morning gave us all a rather fair notion as to what you must be thinkin' of us. He seems to have found a sort of walkin' 'Who's-Who-on-the-Continent' since last night. Pity for some people he did n't find it before! I don't think I 'm sympathetic with your little Cooley. I 'guess,' as you Yankees say, 'he can stand it.' But"—her voice suddenly became louder—"I 'm not in the business of robbin' babies and orphans,

no, my dear friends, nor of helpin' anybody else to rob them either!—Here you are!"

She thrust into his hand a small packet, securely wrapped in paper and fastened with rubber bands. "There 's your block of express checks for six hundred dollars and your I O U to Sneyd with it. Take better care of it next time."

He had been tremulous enough, but at that his whole body began to shake violently.

"*What!*" he quavered.

"I say, take better care of it next time," she said, dropping again into her monotone. "I did n't have such an easy time gettin' it back from them as you might think. I 've got rather a sore wrist, in fact."

She paused at an inarticulate sound from him.

"Oh, that 's soon mended," she laughed drearily. "The truth is, it 's been a good thing for me—your turning up. They 're gettin' in too deep water for me, Héléne and her friends, and I 've broken with the lot, or they 've broken with me, whichever it is. We could n't hang together after the fightin' we 've done to-day. I had to do a lot of threatenin' and things. Welch was ugly, so I had to be ugly too. Never mind"—she checked

an uncertain effort of his to speak—"I saw what you were like, soon as we sat down at the table last night—how new you were and all that. It needed only a glance to see that Héléne had made a mistake about you. She 'd got a notion you were a millionaire like the little Cooley, but I knew better from your talk. She 's clever, but she 's French, and she can't get it out of her head that you could be an American and not a millionaire. Of course, they *all* knew better when you brought out your express checks and talked like somebody in one of the old-time story-books about 'debts of honor.' Even Héléne understood then that the express checks were all you had." She laughed. "I did n't have any trouble gettin' the *note* back!"

She paused again for a moment, then resumed: "There is n't much use our goin' over it all, but I want you to know one thing. Your little friend Cooley made it rather clear that he accused Héléne and me of signalin'. Well, *I* did n't. Perhaps that 's the reason you did n't lose as much as he did; I can't say. And one thing more: all this is n't goin' to do you any harm. I 'm not very keen about philosophy and religion and that, but I believe

if you 're let in for a lot of trouble, and it only *half* kills you, you can get some good of it."

"Do you think," he stammered—"do you think I 'm worth saving?"

She smiled faintly and said:

"You 've probably got a sweetheart in the States somewhere—a nice girl, a pretty young thing who goes to church and thinks you 're a great man, perhaps? Is it so?"

"I am not worthy," he began, choked suddenly, then finished—"to breathe the same air!"

"That 's quite right," Lady Mount-Rhyswicke assured him. "Think what you 'd think of her if she 'd got herself into the same sort of scrape by doin' the things you 've been doin'! And remember *that* if you ever feel impatient with her, or have any temptations to superiority in times to come. And yet"—for the moment she spoke earnestly—"you go back to your little girl, but don't you tell her a word of this. You could n't even tell her that meetin' you has helped me, because she would n't understand."

"Nor do I. I can't."

"Oh, it 's simple. I saw that if I was gettin' down to where I was robbin' babies and orphans . . ."

The cab halted. "Here 's your corner. I told him only to go round the block and come back. Good-by. I 'm off for Amalfi. It 's a good place to rest."

He got out dazedly, and the driver cracked his whip over the little horse; but Mellin lifted a detaining hand.

"*A spet*'," called Lady Mount-Rhyswicke to the driver. "What is it, Mr. Mellin?"

"I can't—I can't look you in the face," he stammered, his attitude perfectly corroborative of his words. "I would—oh, I would kneel in the dust here before you——"

"Some of the poetry you told me you write?"

"I 've never written any poetry," he said, not looking up. "Perhaps I can—now. What I want to say is—I 'm so ashamed of it—I don't know how to get the words out, but I must. I may never see you again, and I must. I 'm sorry—please try to forgive me—I was n't myself when I did it——"

"Blurt it out; that 's the best way."

"I 'm sorry," he floundered—"I 'm sorry I kissed you."

She laughed her tired laugh and said in her

tired voice the last words he was ever destined to hear from her:

"Oh, I don't mind, if you don't. It was so innocent, it was what decided me."

One of the hundreds of good saints that belong to Rome must have overheard her and pitied the young man, for it is ascribable only to some such special act of mercy that Mellin understood (and he did) exactly what she meant.

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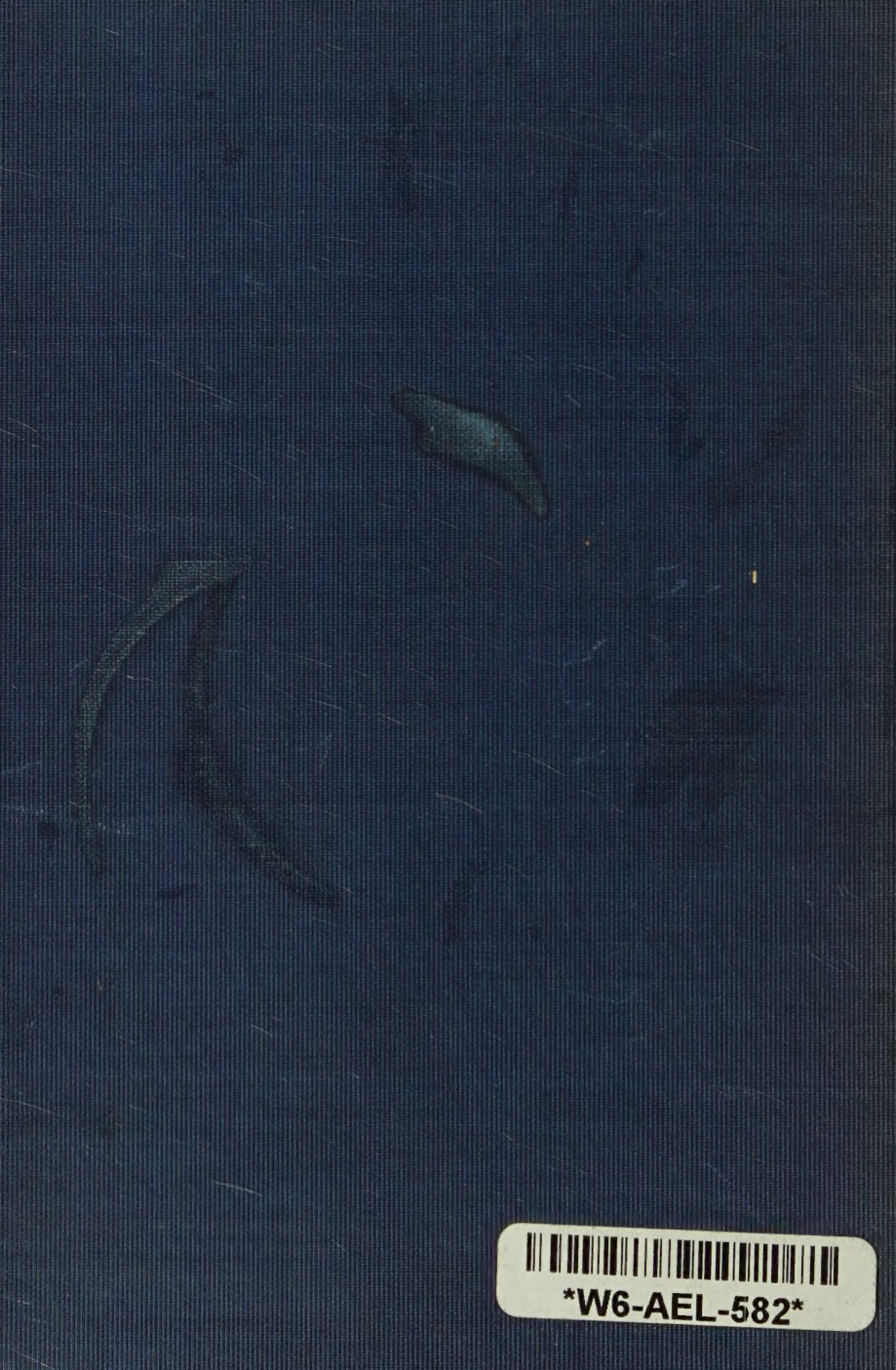
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